

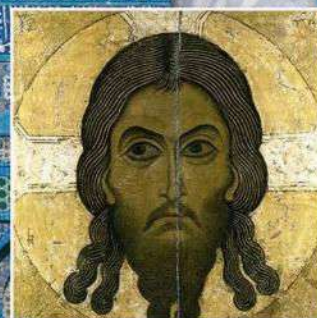
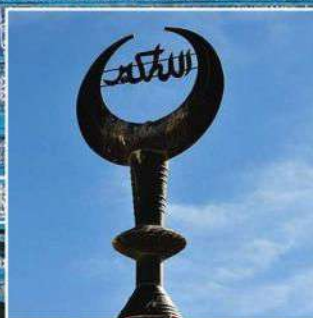
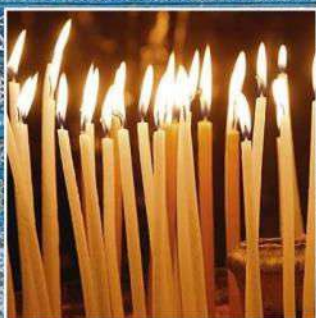
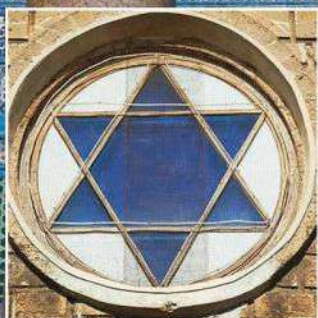
BBC

FROM THE MAKERS OF BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

*Collector's Edition*

# THE STORY OF THE HOLY LAND

THREE THOUSAND YEARS  
OF FAITH, WAR  
AND CONQUEST



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*Collector's Edition*

# THE STORY OF THE HOLY LAND

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF FAITH,  
WAR AND CONQUEST

## WELCOME



Central to three major faiths, the land that is now Israel and the Palestinian territories has a global significance that far exceeds its small size. It is, of course, bitterly contested today, with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute seemingly one of the world's most intractable problems. That dispute owes a great deal to history and a series of conquests that includes the Babylonians, Romans, crusaders, Ottomans and the British, whose three decades of occupation in the 20th century have left a complex legacy.

In this collector's edition from *BBC History Magazine*, we have brought together a number of historical experts to chart the long history of the Holy Land. Over the pages that follow you will discover the stories of some of the most dramatic and telling events of the past 3,000 years – from the Biblical era to the recent Arab-Israeli wars.

Much of this history is fiercely contested, and while we have striven, as far as possible, to offer balanced accounts, there are sure to be omissions and views expressed that some readers may disagree with. Whether or not that's the case, we hope that this magazine will inspire you to continue reading, discussing and investigating this important and challenging history.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Attar'.

**Rob Attar**, Editor

FROM THE MAKERS OF  **HiSTORY** MAGAZINE

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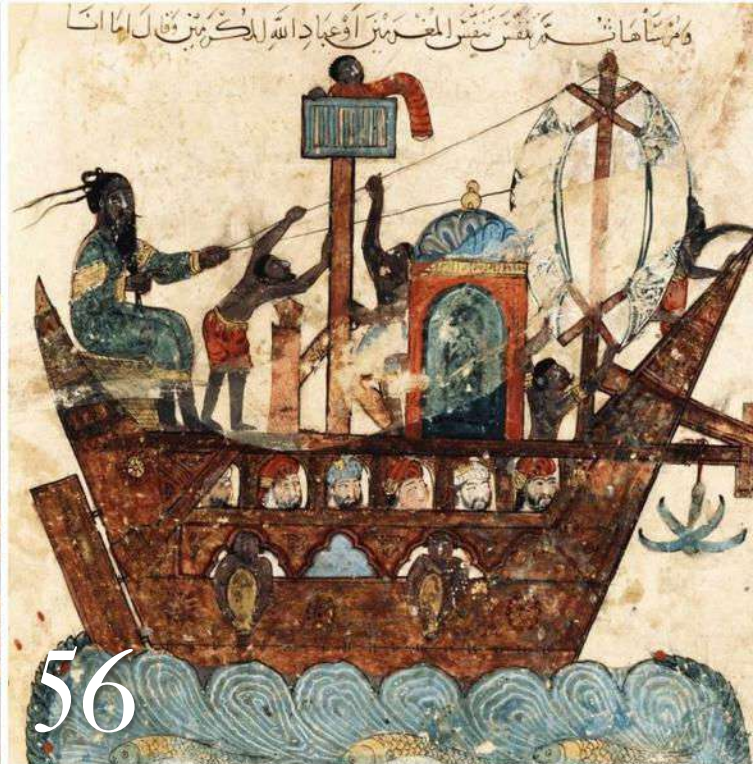


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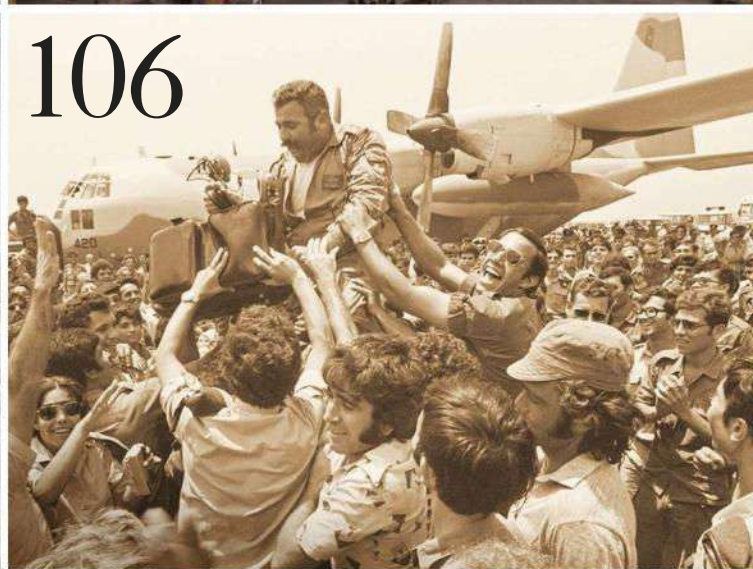
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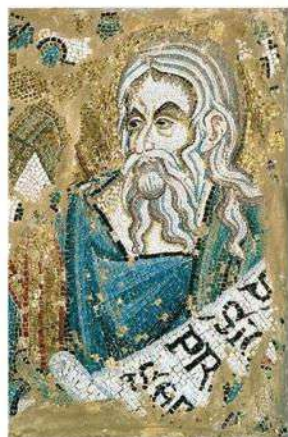


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# The Holy Land

DAN COSSINS chronicles the tumult and turbulence of the last several millennia



A likeness of Abraham from a mosaic at the Basilica di San Marco in Venice

## c2000 BC

According to the Book of Genesis, God calls Abraham to leave Mesopotamia and journey to new lands to found a new nation. Having received promises from God that his sons would inherit the land, **Abraham travels to Canaan**, where he produced Ishmael and Isaac, the first of his eight sons.

## c970–931 BC

### Solomon

reigns over the kingdom of Israel for 40 years, according to the Book of Kings. His extensive building programme includes a **city wall around Jerusalem and the temple**, which becomes the central shrine for the Israelites.

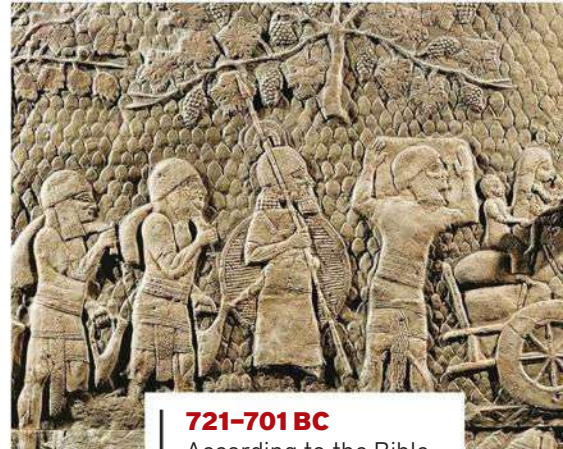


A 13th-century depiction of King Solomon

## 721–701 BC

According to the Bible and Assyrian accounts, **the Assyrians under King Sennacherib** capture the Israelite capital of Samaria and much of the northern kingdom of Israel. They later take control of parts of Judah. Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem, but does not capture the city.

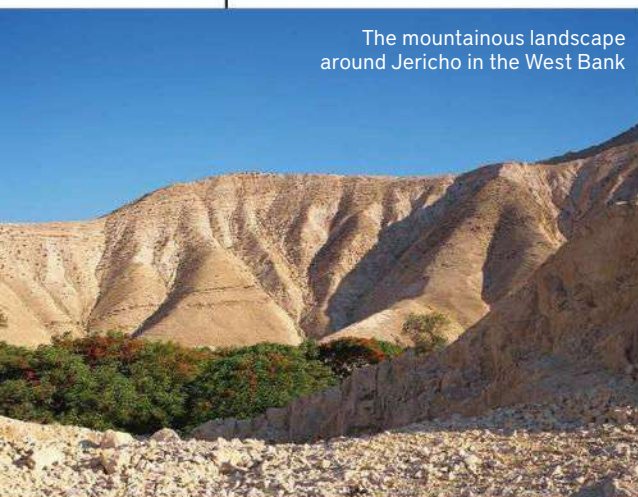
ABOVE: The attack on the town of Lachish was one of many launched on various Israelite settlements by the Assyrian king Sennacherib



## 8000 BC

### c8000 BC

**An agricultural community exists at Jericho** in a region known as Canaan, near the Jordan river in what is now the West Bank. Archaeological excavations subsequently show that there was a large stone wall around the settlement.



The mountainous landscape around Jericho in the West Bank

## 1000 BC

### c1250 BC

In the narrative provided by the Book of Exodus, **Moses leads the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt toward Canaan**. The Israelites conquer the Canaanites, destroying Jericho. Archaeological excavations have confirmed that towns in the region were razed to the ground between 1250 and 1200 BC, though who or what caused such destruction is not known.



Moses leads the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and across the Red Sea

## 700 BC

### c931 BC

The Book of Kings says that Solomon dies around this time and his kingdom is divided in two. The northern tribes create their own **kingdom of Israel, with Samaria as the capital**. The southern tribes unite under **the kingdom of Judah**, from which the term Jew is later derived. Their capital is Jerusalem.





### 539 BC

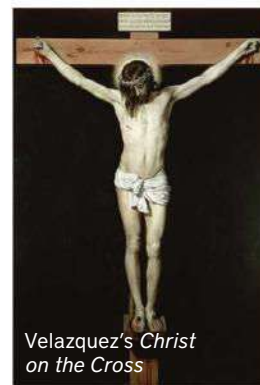
Various sources – including the Cyrus Cylinder, an inscribed clay cylinder (above) held at the British Museum in London – say that the **Persians, led by Cyrus the Great, conquer Babylonia**. This is a vast empire covering Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian territories. Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem, where they consecrate the Second Temple in 516.



This Roman floor mosaic shows Persian cavalry under attack from Alexander the Great

### 331 BC

**Alexander the Great**, king of Macedonia, defeats the Persians at Gaugamela, in modern-day Iraq. Alexander becomes the ruler of a vast empire stretching from Macedonia in the west to India in the east. **The Holy Land is now part of a Hellenistic empire** united by Greek language and culture. Under Greek rule, Judah becomes known as Judea.



Velazquez's *Christ on the Cross*

### AD 33

The narrative provided by the Gospels has it that when **Jesus**, a well-known preacher and healer, observes Passover in Jerusalem, he **is arrested, tried and crucified by the Romans**. His disciples are convinced that Jesus has risen from the dead and persuade others to believe in the Resurrection, which leads to the **birth of a new religion called Christianity**.

### 63 BC

A short-lived civil war in Judea comes to an end when the Roman general Pompeius Magnus (Pompey) captures Jerusalem. In 37 BC, the Roman Senate makes **Herod the Great king of the Jews**. Judea is made a Roman province in AD 6.

## 500 BC

### 597–587 BC

In accounts in the Babylonian Chronicles and the Second Book of Kings, **the Babylonians (under King Nebuchadnezzar II) capture Jerusalem** and install Zedekiah as king of Judah. Zedekiah revolts against Babylon, to which Nebuchadnezzar responds by re-capturing Jerusalem in 587. **His army destroys the city and Solomon's temple** before driving the Jews into exile.

### c444 BC

According to the Hebrew Bible, Jewish leader Nehemiah, having been released from captivity by the Persian king Artaxerxes I, travels to Jerusalem and helps to reconstruct the city. Under **his direction, the Jews rebuild the city walls**.



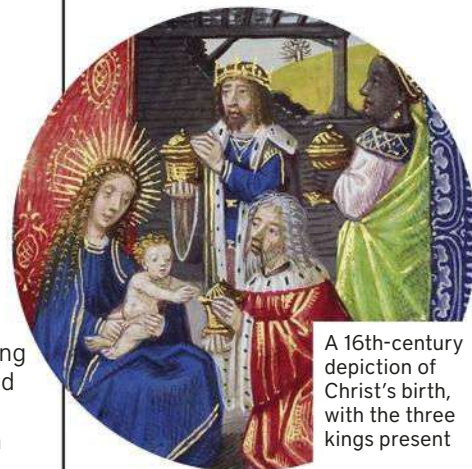
This illustration shows the forces of King Nebuchadnezzar holding Jerusalem to siege

## 100 BC

### 167 BC

As reported in the Hebrew book *I Maccabees*, **Judean rebels (whose leaders are known as the Maccabees) rise up against Antiochus IV**, the king of the Greek Seleucid empire who had outlawed the Jewish religion. After the Maccabees defeat their foes in AD 164, they enter Jerusalem and cleanse the temple. Judea later becomes an independent state.

## AD 0



A 16th-century depiction of Christ's birth, with the three kings present

### c6 BC

The Books of Matthew and Luke say that Jesus Christ, known in his lifetime as **Jesus of Nazareth, is born in Bethlehem** shortly before the death of Herod the Great. According to biblical accounts, his father Joseph was a carpenter and his mother, Mary, was a virgin at the time of his birth.

## AD 50





**AD 66**

**The Jews of Judea rise up against their Roman rulers**, sparking the First Jewish-Roman War. Jewish forces expel the Romans from Jerusalem and overwhelm them at Beth Horon. Emperor Nero sends Vespasian to crush the rebellion. In AD 70, after a seven-month siege, his forces recapture Jerusalem. **The city is ruined.**

ABOVE: A relief at the Roman Forum in Rome shows the triumphal procession following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70

**AD 132-35**

**Clashes between Jews and Romans culminate in another full-scale war.** Jewish forces – led by Simon Bar Kokhba – score some early victories, but eventually succumb to a vast Roman army commanded by Julius Severus. The Jewish population is decimated, though they survive in Galilee. Hadrian bans Jews from Jerusalem, having reportedly already outlawed circumcision.



**AD 614**

**The Persians conquer Syria and Palestine**, capturing Jerusalem and destroying the True Cross, which Christians believe is the remnants of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. In AD 628, **Byzantine emperor Heraclius takes back the city and restores the True Cross** (see picture above). Islamic forces conquer Jerusalem 10 years later, beginning a long period of Islamic control over Palestine.

**AD 705**

A small Muslim prayer house close to the site of the original Jewish temple is expanded by the Umayyad caliphs. **Twice Abbasid caliphs rebuild this, the Al-Aqsa Mosque**, in the eighth century. When an earthquake destroys it in 1033, the Fatimid caliph Ali az-Zahir builds another Al-Aqsa Mosque, which survives today (below).



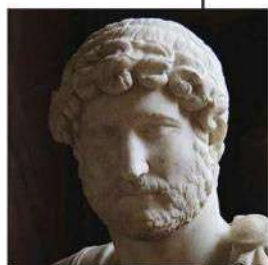
**AD 100**

**AD 300**

**AD 700**

**AD 130**

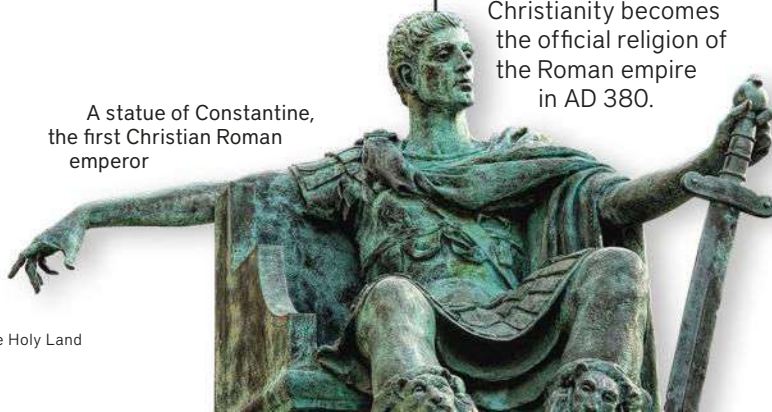
**Emperor Hadrian** (pictured) decides to rebuild the ruined city of Jerusalem as a Roman colony inhabited by legionaries, renaming it Aelia Capitolina. It remains unclear how much of his plan is completed. But the historian Cassius Dio reports that **Hadrian built a temple to the Roman god Jupiter** on the Temple Mount, provoking outrage among the Jews.



**AD 313**

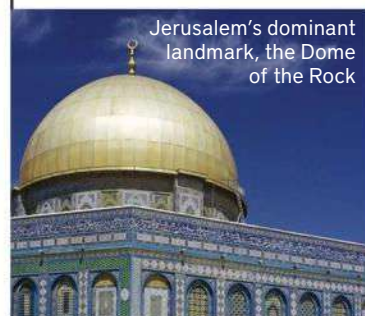
**Emperor Constantine**, himself a committed Christian, establishes **toleration for Christians throughout the Roman empire, including Palestine.** The proclamation, known as the edict of Milan, assures the legal rights of Christians, who had suffered persecution at the hands of Romans for centuries, as well as directing the return of confiscated property. Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman empire in AD 380.

A statue of Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor



**AD 691-92**

**The Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik builds a shrine, the Dome of the Rock**, on the Temple Mount, an area known to Muslims as Al-Haram al-Sharif. Muslims believe **the Prophet Muhammad (570-632), founder of Islam, ascended to heaven from the rock** over which the shrine was constructed. Jews, meanwhile, believe it was here that Abraham, father to the Hebrew people, prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac.



Jerusalem's dominant landmark, the Dome of the Rock



**AD 969**

**The Fatimid caliphs**, already rulers of an Islamic empire covering much of north Africa, conquer the Nile Valley and go on to take Palestine and Syria. In 1009, caliph al-Hakim **destroys the Church of the Holy Sepulchre**, venerated by Christians as the site of Jesus's burial and resurrection.



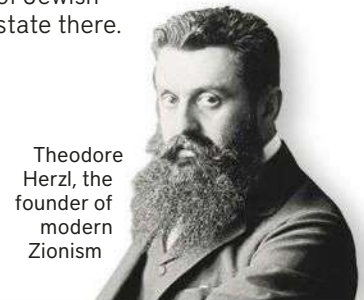
**October 1187**

Having conquered most of the Christian states, Islamic forces under Saladin, sultan of Egypt and Syria, capture Jerusalem. The Third Crusade fails to re-take it. In 1192, **Richard the Lionheart signs a three-year truce with Saladin** that allows Christians to visit holy sites in the city.

ABOVE: Tiles from Chertsey Abbey near London show Richard and Saladin in combat

**August 1897**

Austro-Hungarian journalist **Theodore Herzl co-founds the Zionist Organisation**—later the World Zionist Organisation—to establish **a legally assured home in Palestine for the Jewish people**. The large Arab population in Palestine quickly express their resistance to any form of Jewish state there.



Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism

AD 1000

1200

1500

1900

**July 1099**

**A Christian army, gathered from across western Europe, captures Jerusalem** from the Fatimid Islamic government. The victors establish four Christian states in the Levant. Christendom sees the First Crusade's improbable triumph as the will of God, a belief that helps to sustain centuries of crusading.

The capture of Jerusalem during the First Crusade in 1099



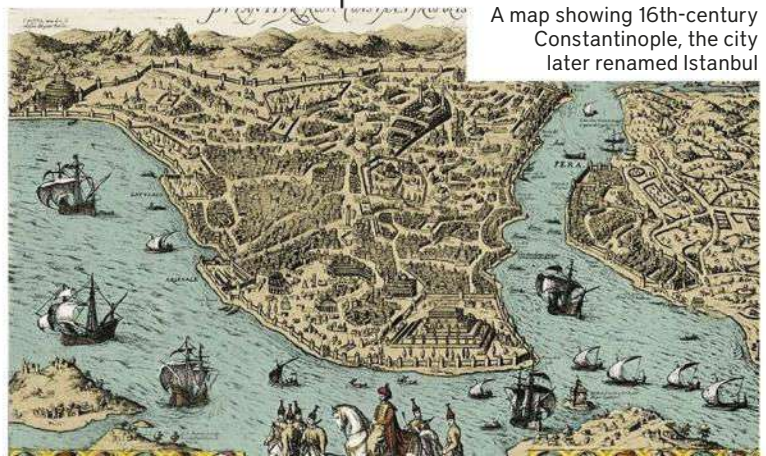
**February 1229**

**Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor** and leader of the Sixth Crusade, negotiates the return to crusader control of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and a corridor of land running to the sea. The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque remain under Islamic control. The peace lasts until 1244, after which **Muslims take control of Jerusalem again**.

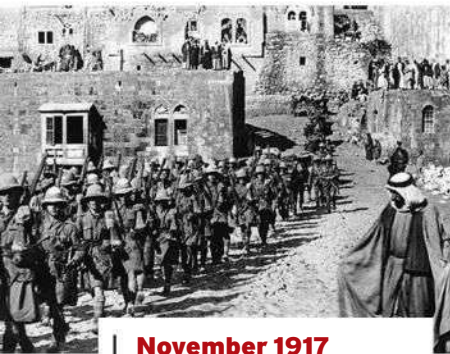
**1516–17**

**The Ottomans defeat the Mamluks**, taking control of the Levant, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. The victory transforms **the Ottoman empire**, ruled from Constantinople (now Istanbul), into a vast realm encompassing Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus and the holy city of Mecca.

A map showing 16th-century Constantinople, the city later renamed Istanbul







**November 1917**

The British government issues **the Balfour Declaration in support of the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine**. It stipulates that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities". In 1918, British forces capture Palestine during the First World War. In July 1922, **the League of Nations approve the British mandate**.

British soldiers march through the city of Es Salt following its capture in March 1918 as part of the campaign to conquer Palestine

**29 November 1947**

The United Nations (UN) votes for **the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states**, with Greater Jerusalem under international control. Most of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had moved there since 1918 accept the plan, but the majority Arab population reject it. Britain plans to pull out of Palestine on 15 May 1948.



**June 1967**

**Israel scores a decisive victory in the Six-Day War**, capturing the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordan. These occupied territories become a major bone of contention and sporadic fighting follows.

**17 September 1978**

**Israel and Egypt agree to sign a peace treaty following a summit at Camp David**, Maryland, brokered by US president Jimmy Carter. Israel agrees to withdraw from Sinai, and Egypt promises to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. The treaty is signed in March 1979.

1920

1950

1970

1980

**April 1936**

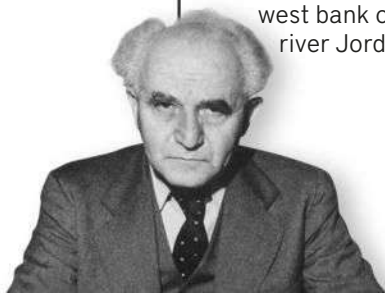
Following escalating intercommunity violence in British-controlled Palestine, Arab politicians respond to their people's protests by launching a general strike. **The movement turns into a violent uprising, with Arab rebels attacking Jewish settlements**, leading the British to consider partitioning the region. British troops are sent in, but the revolt continues well into 1939.

The British Army searches an Arab man in the port of Haifa during the Arab revolt of the late 1930s

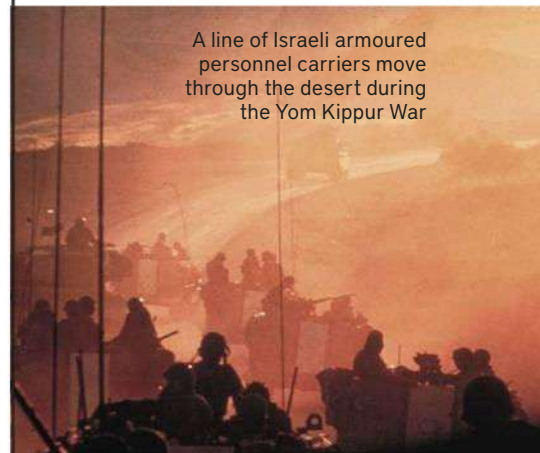


**14 May 1948**

Zionist leader David Ben Gurion (below) declares **the birth of the State of Israel, sparking the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli war**. Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq attack the newborn state, but Israel comes out on top. When the armistice agreements are signed in 1949, Israel occupies roughly 80 per cent of Palestine. **More than 700,000 Arabs are made refugees**, many in the Gaza Strip, controlled by Egypt, and Jordanian-annexed lands on the west bank of the river Jordan.



A line of Israeli armoured personnel carriers move through the desert during the Yom Kippur War



**6 October 1973**  
**Egypt and Syria simultaneously strike Israel on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur**, initiating the Yom Kippur War. When hostilities cease on 25 October, Israel claims victory, but its sense of invincibility has been shaken by Egypt's initial successes.





The Lebanese capital Beirut comes under attack from Israeli shelling in 1982

**6 June 1982**

**Israel invades southern Lebanon**, where the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has its strongholds. Surrounded in Beirut and under heavy bombardment, **the PLO negotiates with Israel for a safe escape**. Israel's subsequent occupation of Lebanon, which ends in June 1985, leads to the formation of the Iran-backed **Muslim militant group Hezbollah**.

**September 1993**  
**Following secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway**, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat **agree to Palestinian self-government** in Gaza and parts of the West Bank. Both accept UN resolutions requiring Israeli forces to withdraw from Arab territories gained in the Six-Day War and for the PLO to recognise Israel's right to peace and security.

**July 2000**

**Arafat and Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak** (below) meet at Camp David, Maryland, but fail to find agreement on the status of Jerusalem and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Following a controversial visit by Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount complex, Palestinians launch the Second Intifada uprising. In 2002, **Israel starts building a separation wall in the West Bank**.



Palestinian children in Gaza City protest against the Israeli attacks

**29 February 2008**

Following rocket attacks launched from Hamas-controlled Gaza, then under blockade, **Israel launches a 22-day assault on Gaza**. A ceasefire comes into effect in June. But Israel starts a new combined air and ground attack on 27 December, which lasts until 18 January 2009. In September, a UN special report accuses both Palestinian militants and the Israeli Defence Force of **war crimes**.

1990

2000

2010

**December 1987**  
**Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip launch the First Intifada**, an uprising to end Israeli occupation and create an independent Palestinian state. Palestinian youths attack the Israeli Defence Force, which dishes out severe reprisals – a pattern of violence that continues for five years.

**1996–99**

**Both sides break the peace agreements**. Israel fails to pull out of the West Bank, while the Palestinian National Authority (PA) fails to curb militant attacks on Israel. The deadline for a resolution signed by Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 passes on 4 May 1999.

**January 2005**

Following Arafat's death from a mysterious blood disorder the previous November, Mahmoud Abbas (below) is elected president of the PA. Abbas persuades Hamas and Islamic Jihad to temporarily halt their attacks, and **Abbas and Sharon later announce a mutual ceasefire**. In August and September, Israel removes its settlers and troops from the Gaza Strip.



**8 July 2014**

Israel launches another **full-scale military operation in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip**. As with the 2008 attacks, the stated aim of the operation is to stop Hamas from firing rockets into Israel. The war lasts until 26 August. According to the UN, 2,205 Palestinians (including at least 1,483 civilians) and 71 Israelis are killed. ■

GETTY IMAGES



A woman at a prison camp in the Gaza Strip shows her defiance during the Palestinian Intifada



# LAND OF ANCIEN

EXPLORING THE REGION'S RICH EARLY HISTORY

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+ **CANAAN**, the Holy Land's ancient forerunner examined

---

+ Ten archaeological **DISCOVERIES** and their links to the Bible

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+ The Land of **JESUS** – life in Judea in the time of Christ

---

+ Ten outstanding **HISTORIC SITES** of the Holy Land

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# THE TS

CORBIS

## OVERARCHING AMBITION

An aqueduct built by Judean king Herod in Caesarea, the city that became the Romans' administrative centre in the land







# CANAAN *and the* Canaanites

Covering a large part of the eastern Mediterranean during the second millennium BC, the land of Canaan had long disappeared by the time the Bible was written.

**JONATHAN TUBB** examines the limited evidence to reveal what we know of Canaanite culture





### ANCIENT ENEMIES

A group of Canaanite prisoners shown on a 14th-century BC Egyptian relief

OPPOSITE PAGE: A piece of gold jewellery dating from the second millennium BC and recovered during the 1930s from the site of the Canaanite city of Tell el'Ajjul





Even those with the most casual acquaintance of the Bible are likely to have encountered the Canaanites, depicted as the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan against whom the Israelites fought for ultimate possession. The picture of the Canaanites and their land that emerges from the biblical literature is, however, very vague at best. This is hardly surprising as Canaan as a meaningful geographical entity had long since disappeared by the time these stories were composed and compiled, probably some time in the sixth century BC. The identity of the Canaanites, too, was only preserved as an archaic term by their direct descendents, the Phoenicians.

The ancient textual sources are equally unhelpful in providing any further definition. Of the very few ancient texts referring to ‘Canaanites’ and the ‘Land of Canaan’, the earliest, found at Mari in eastern Syria and dating to the 18th century BC, refers to “thieves and Canaanites”. In the late 15th century BC, the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis II states that he had “deported Canaanites”, while Canaanites appear in several of the 14th-century BC Amarna letters, correspondence on clay tablets sent to and from the Egyptian administration. The land of Canaan also appears in several other ancient texts and, by and large, seems to indicate a territory bounded to the south by the Wadi el-Arish delta, to the north by the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains, to the east by Transjordanian and to the west, of course, by the Mediterranean.

Neither the biblical nor the ancient sources, then, provide sufficient information to allow for the reconstruction of Canaanite history or geography. How is it then that we can today talk about the Canaanites and Canaan with such authority? The answer is that we, as archaeologists without the benefit of contemporary texts that have so brilliantly and fully illuminated the neighbouring cultures of north Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt, have *created* an identity for the Canaanites and their land. During the past 150 or so years, archaeologists working in the Levant in the eastern Mediterranean have defined, through the results of surveys and excavations, a territory throughout which the material culture – pottery, metalwork,

architecture, burial types and so forth – is recognisably similar but distinctively different from what lies beyond it. When applied to a map, this geographical entity is seen to be L-shaped, extending southwards from coastal Syria and into Lebanon. South of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains, it then extends southwards and eastwards to include Israel, Palestine and Transjordan.

Interestingly, this ‘archaeological’ land of Canaan conforms very closely with that defined by the meagre textual sources. The study of the Canaanite material culture has revealed another important aspect—namely that it shows a high degree of continuity from the deep reaches of pre-history right through to the Hellenistic period and beyond. In other words, since there is nothing to suggest that there have been any major changes in population, the Canaanites must be seen as the indigenous and enduring population of the land of Canaan. This fact allows us to see peoples such as the Phoenicians and, perhaps more controversially, the Israelites not as newcomers but as having emerged and developed from a purely indigenous Canaanite background.

Drawing our resources together, it is entirely possible to reconstruct a very convincing history of Canaan based on scientifically derived and objectively interpreted data. This reconstruction does not rely in any way at all, however, on the biblical sources. It contains no patriarchal wanderings, no exodus, no conquest, no United Monarchy. This is quite deliberate as the use of the Bible as a source of history (as opposed to faith) is fraught with problems, not least of which is that it almost certainly was written and compiled no earlier than the sixth century BC, long after many of the events presented. Certainly none of the subjects listed above can be substantiated archaeologically, nor by corroboration with contemporary textual sources.

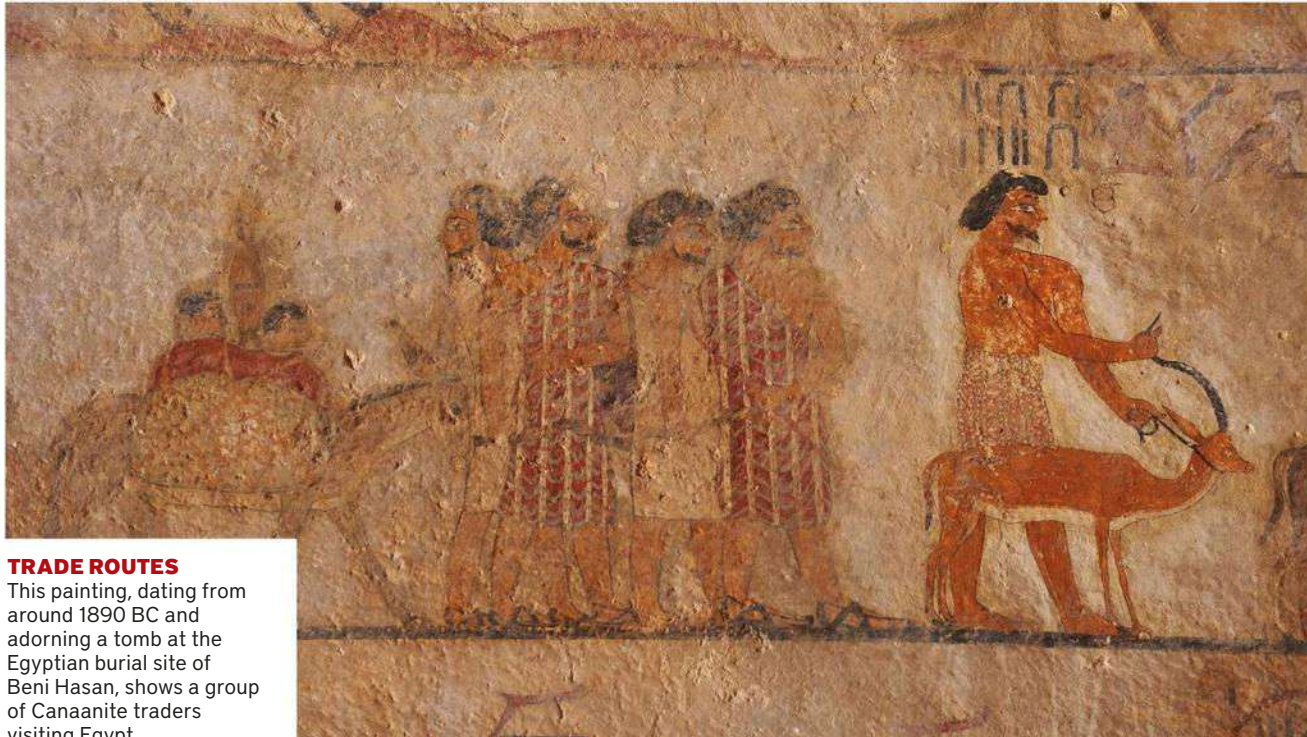
Canaanite prehistory is as rich and varied as that of any other region of the Middle East. By the eighth millennium BC, long before pottery had been invented, the Canaanites had asserted a distinctive identity, as seen in the series of remarkable large-scale lime-plaster human statues from ‘Ain Ghazal in Jordan.

Towards the end of the fourth millennium BC, the Levant witnessed a dramatic growth of urbanism, with the



One of the ancient lime-plaster statues found at ‘Ain Ghazal on the outskirts of latter-day Amman in Jordan





### TRADE ROUTES

This painting, dating from around 1890 BC and adorning a tomb at the Egyptian burial site of Beni Hasan, shows a group of Canaanite traders visiting Egypt

development of cities and city states. Archaeology, combined with environmental sciences, has demonstrated a vibrant economy at this time (the first three-quarters of the third millennium), based on productive agriculture, horticulture and trade, primarily with Egypt.

In the final 200 years of the third millennium, much of Canaan suffered a period of recession (resulting from the collapse of the Old Kingdom in Egypt coupled with a climate change) and most towns and cities were abandoned. Profound changes in the material culture of this phase (known as the intermediate early Bronze/middle Bronze Age) can be explained in terms of the local population's response to altered economic and political conditions.

A revitalisation of the economy can be observed at the start of the second millennium with a return to urban life. It is at this time that an infiltration of Canaanites into the Egyptian Delta can be observed; these rose to political power as the so-called Hyksos. Excavations at their capital, Avaris (modern Tall al-Dab'a), have provided rare insights into the lives of people who, for a brief time, dominated the whole of Egypt. This period, the Middle Bronze Age, represented something of a golden age for Canaan and saw the development of a rich, highly accomplished artistic

and craft tradition that would ultimately be passed to the Phoenicians. We should also remember that it was at this time that some very intelligent Canaanite invented the alphabet; again, something that would be passed to the Phoenicians and ultimately, of course, to ourselves.

Around the middle of the second millennium, the pharaohs of the native Egyptian 18th dynasty expelled the Hyksos from the borders of Egypt and pursued them into Canaan and beyond. Widespread destruction levels at sites throughout the Levant bear witness to the series of military campaigns that would ultimately bring Canaan under direct Egyptian administrative control with the creation of its Asiatic empire.

From the 14th-century administrative documents of this empire, discovered at el-Amarna, we learn of the petty squabbles between rival Canaanite princes and the political instability caused by the expansion of the Hittite empire to the north. The first steps towards the creation of historical Israel can also be seen in the Amarna correspondence, where we can detect a real polarisation of late Bronze Age Canaanite society.

These documents make frequent reference to the Habiru, seen by the Egyptians as bands of lawless troublemakers, living on the fringes of society and posing a threat to it. In reality, these Habiru (or Hebrews, as we better know them) can be characterised as freedom-fighters—dissident, disaffected and dispossessed Canaanites, whose

## Canaanite prehistory is as rich and varied as that of any other region of the Middle East





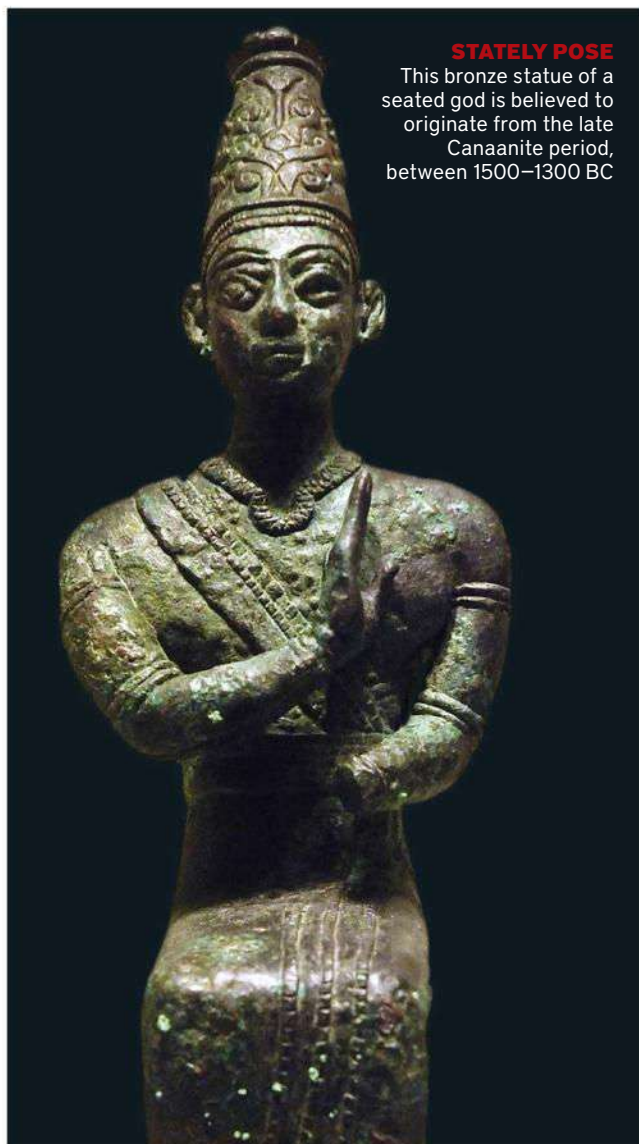
### FACE VALUE

The head of a Canaanite has been vividly painted on this fragment of a jar now on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem



### STATELY POSE

This bronze statue of a seated god is believed to originate from the late Canaanite period, between 1500–1300 BC





military actions against an increasingly decadent Egypto-Canaanite establishment posed a threat to the stability of the empire. From the texts, it is clear that the principal arena of their activities was in the central hill country, and many of the letters refer to the role of a certain Labayu and his sons as Habiru leaders with a focus of their interests at the city of Shechem. There is an obvious resonance here, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that the adventures of the Habiru, as reported in the Amarna correspondence, formed such an important element of regional folk tradition that they were preserved and transmitted orally before being captured by the Bible writers in the sixth century to form the basis of the equally epic tales of Joshua and his conquest of Canaan.



**THE ORIGINS OF ABC**  
An example of the Phoenician alphabet, developed from the proto-Canaanite alphabet during the 15th century BC

**E**gypt's recognition of the significance and status of the hill country population became apparent in the 13th century BC, in the reign of the pharaoh Merneptah, when a victory stela (an inscribed stone), recording a campaign in southern Canaan, makes the first recorded reference to 'Israel', used to represent a loose-knit confederation of Habiru towns.

In other words, based on archaeological findings and contemporary texts, it is possible to explain the rise of historical Israel as an 'alternative Canaan', based in the central hill country region during the period of Egyptian domination. Before Israel could develop into a nation state, however, a totally unexpected event occurred which had far-reaching effects on the entire region.

Around 1200 BC, the Levant (and Egypt itself) experienced a ferocious series of attacks, by both land and sea, by an enigmatic collection of people of ultimately Aegean and Anatolian origin, known collectively as the 'Sea Peoples' and including their most familiar group, the Philistines. Few cities along the Levantine coast seem to have escaped destruction at this time. Although the pharaoh of the time, Ramses III, did his best to repel and contain the invaders, he could not prevent their subse-

quent settlement. More importantly, the resources employed in fighting the Sea Peoples crippled Egypt's economy to such an extent that its empire could no longer be sustained. By the middle of the 12th century BC, the Egyptians dissolved their Asiatic empire and pulled out of Canaan.

Many scholars talk of a 'dark age' at this point, one lasting some 200 or so years. In

reality, there was no dark age – just a totally understandable period of readjustment following the withdrawal of the great powers (Egypt, and in the north, the Hittites) and the inevitable power vacuum that ensued.

The political map was redrawn forever and shows what remained of old Canaan, preserved on the northern coast, now reborn as Phoenicia and poised to spread Canaanite culture (including the alphabet) throughout the Mediterranean. Philistines and other Sea Peoples occupied areas further down the Levantine coast.

In the heartland of Canaan, there was an immense vacuum left by the Egyptians' departure. With the removal of their resources, including most probably the Canaanite elite, they left a society deeply divided and so impoverished that it would take some 250 years to re-integrate the two elements of its population (lowland Canaanites and hill-country Hebrews or Israelites) and to regain a degree of prosperity. This period of recession is clear both from the archaeological record and from the absence of references to the region in the contemporary texts from Egypt, Assyria and the Aramaean states. Although poor and ill-documented, this period of recession did, in reality, see the formation of historical Israel (the development in the 9th century BC of the first nation state whose capital was Samaria), founded by Omri and raised to the status of an international power by his son, Ahab.

Nation statehood, however, proved to be a short-lived dream. In 701, Samaria and the kingdom of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians. A little more than 115 years later, its successor kingdom of Judah, based at Jerusalem, fell to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. It was left to the Phoenicians to carry the torch of the Canaanites into the classical era. ■

# We should remember that it was a very intelligent Canaanite who invented the alphabet





The excavated fortifications at Gezer (see page 23)

# DIGGING *FOR THE* BIBLE

Leading biblical archaeologist **AREN MAEIR** identifies 10 key discoveries from the Holy Land and explains how they relate to the Old Testament



# 1 The Merneptah Stele

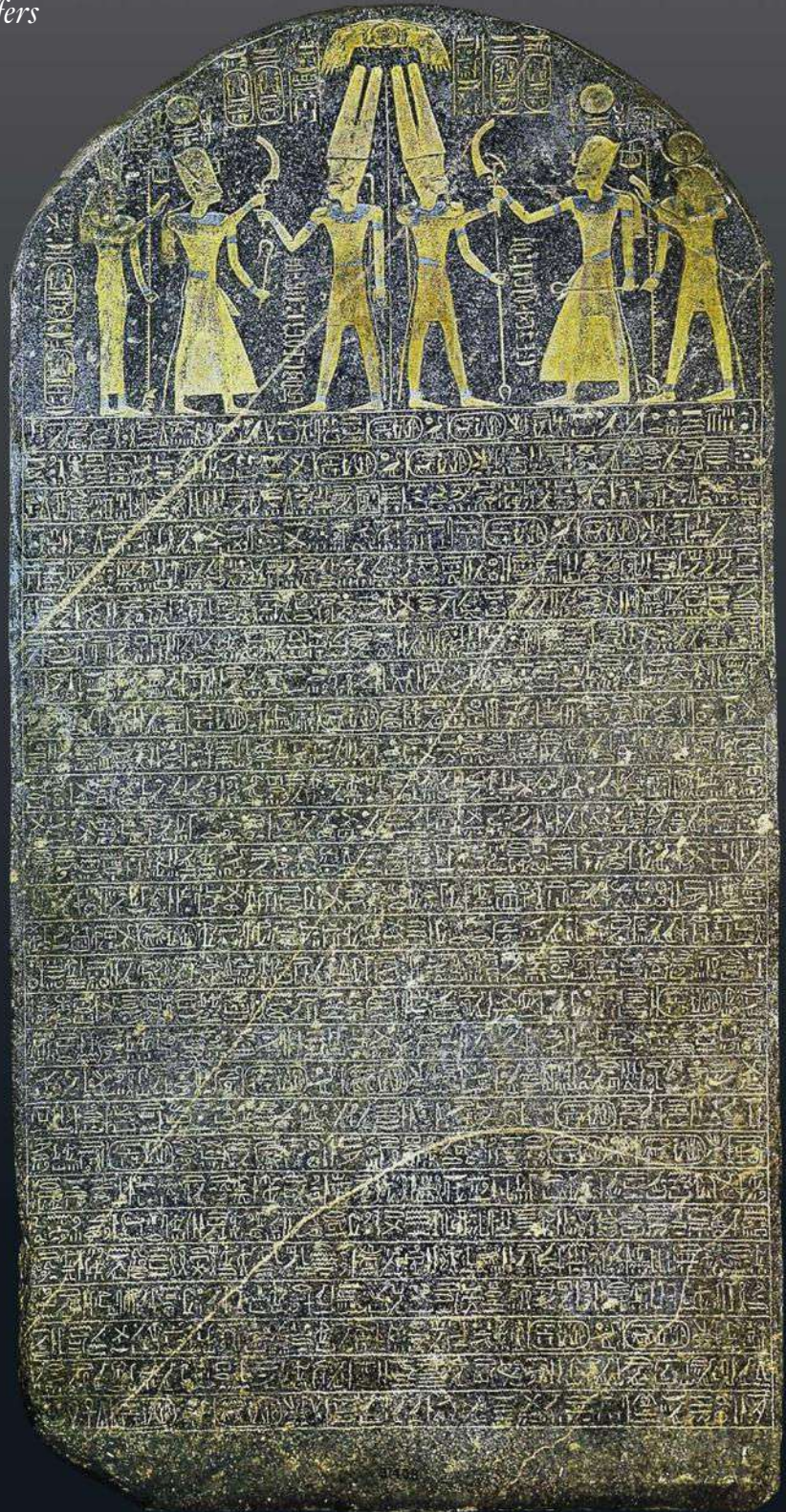
*The stone inscription that offers the earliest reference to Israel*

The Merneptah Stele is an incised stone inscription that was erected under the order of Merneptah, king of the 19th Egyptian Dynasty, who reigned between approximately 1213 and 1203 BC. In this stele, there is the earliest clear mention of the entity 'Israel', in the context of a description of the king's campaign to ancient Canaan.

In the description of the enemies who were defeated in this campaign, the statement "Israel is laid waste and his seed is not" appears. As such, this is of central importance for the study of history of early Israel, as this mention can serve as the well-accepted "Archimedean point" for the earliest recognition of a cultural/ethnic entity called Israel.

This late 13th-century BC mention corresponds quite well with the earliest (possible) archaeological evidence of the settlement of the 'Israelite' tribes in Canaan in the central hills region. This thus indicates the likelihood of this date for the first appearance of Israel in Canaan at the time. Significantly, further mention in non-biblical texts of other aspects relating to ancient Israel and Judah does not occur before the mid-ninth century BC, some 350 years later.

The inscription on the Merneptah Stele declares "Israel is laid waste and his seed is not"



Discovered in Thebes, the ancient capital of Egypt, in 1896, the Merneptah Stele is now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo







The site at Mount Ebal, as seen today

## 2 Mount Ebal

*Is this Iron Age site connected to Joshua's altar?*

On the north-eastern side of Mount Ebal, just to the north of modern-day Nablus (ancient Shechem/Neapolis) in the West Bank, the Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal discovered a site dating to the early Iron Age, in the period covering the late 13th/early 12th century BC. Zertal suggested identifying it as a cultic site of the early Israelites, and postulated connecting the site to the biblical narrative of an altar erected by Joshua on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:31-35). He suggested that it served as a central cultic site for the earliest Israelite settlers in this region

following their arrival in Canaan from the east.

Zertal's interpretation has been questioned by many scholars. While this site clearly dates to the early Iron Age and is most likely Israelite, other parts of his interpretation are debated. Most agree that it is a cultic site related to the early Israelite settlement in the region, but not directly connected to 'Joshua's altar', while others question the very cultic orientation of the site. In any case, it is one of the more important and well-known sites illustrating the earliest evidence of the Israelite tribes in Canaan.

## 3 The discoveries of Jerusalem

*The Holy City shows its history at every turn*

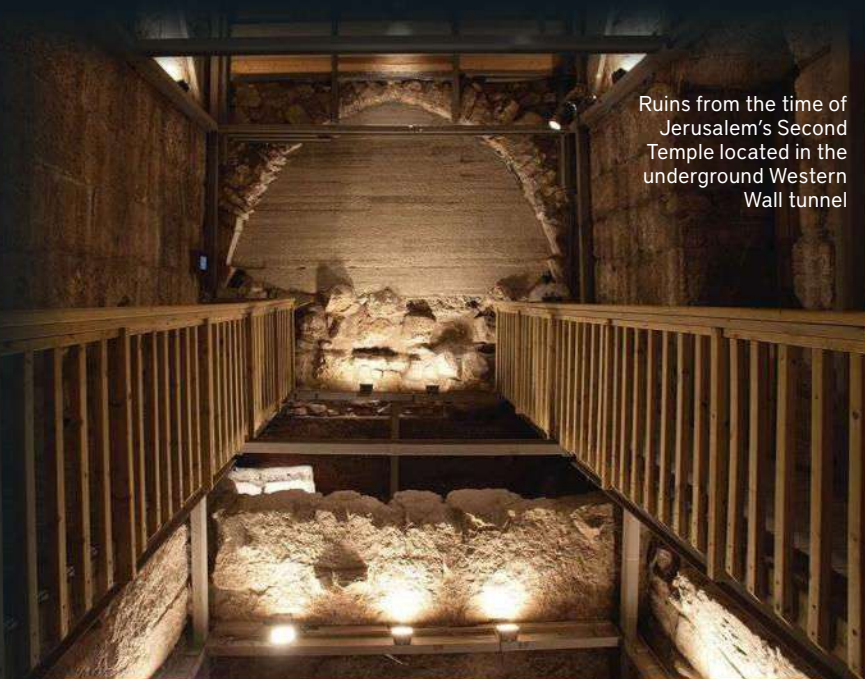
Jerusalem is mentioned and/or referred to more often than any other site in the biblical text. As the capital of the Judahite monarchy during the Iron Age (the so-called "First Temple period") and the location of the most important cultic site (the Temple of Solomon), it has been the religious, cultural and political focus of Israelite and Jewish history ever since.

Following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem around 586 BC, the city has experienced many ups and downs. During the Persian, Hellenistic and early Roman periods, a Jewish temple once again existed in Jerusalem, the city returning to being the political and religious centre of the Jews until its destruction again by the Romans in AD 70.

Early Christianity, and subsequently Islam as well, continued to see Jerusalem as a holy city where major religious events occurred. Among the most noteworthy finds in Jerusalem relevant to the Bible are the Iron Age remains in the City of

David, the original kernel of the city, where fortifications, water systems, houses and even a possible palace have been found. On the Temple Mount, remains of the external construction of the Second Temple's precinct have been found, dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

In other parts of the old city, impressive remains of the Iron Age (First Temple), Hellenistic-Roman periods (Second Temple, early Christian), reflecting various stages in the history of Jerusalem and relating to the biblical periods, have been uncovered.



Ruins from the time of Jerusalem's Second Temple located in the underground Western Wall tunnel



# 4 Israelite fortifications at Hazor, Gezer and Megiddo

*These sites' finds are possible indications of King Solomon's reign*

In I Kings 9:15, the biblical narrative informs us that King Solomon, as part of the building projects that he conducted, fortified the settlements of Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer. These three locations, in modern-day Israel, have been excavated and, at each site, similar large-scale city gates were found. These, according to some scholars, date to the 10th century BC; standard biblical chronology has this as the period in which Solomon reigned.

Accordingly, these gates are seen by some scholars as evidence of the impressive building activities of Solomon's reign and indicate the actual existence of this reign (which is not mentioned in any non-biblical source).

Other scholars question this interpretation for two reasons, believing that these gates are a) not necessarily built at the same time; b) may not date to the 10th century BC, but actually to later phases in the Iron Age.

The large-scale city gates excavated at these fortifications date, say some scholars, from the 10th century BC

Ruins that date to the 10th or 9th century BC at Megiddo, which is now a Unesco World Heritage Site



## GLOSSARY

**Ahab:** A ninth-century BC king of Israel. He was married to Jezebel, whose name has come to embody wickedness.

**Aramaic:** A Semitic language, similar to Hebrew, that was spoken widely in the Middle East in the biblical era. It was commonly spoken by Jews and parts of the Old Testament are written in it.

**Assyria:** A kingdom in what is now Iraq that was the centre of a major Middle Eastern empire from the ninth to seventh centuries BC.

**Cultic:** Relating to a religious cult.

**Daughters of Zelophad:** Five sisters who appear in the Book of Numbers. The Bible speaks of them petitioning Moses for women's rights, during the period of the Exodus.

**Hellenistic:** Relating to Greek language or culture, in the period following the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC). By this stage Greek culture was taking on a number of foreign influences.

**Kingdom of Israel:** A kingdom mentioned in the Old Testament that roughly corresponds to modern Israel/Palestine. According to the

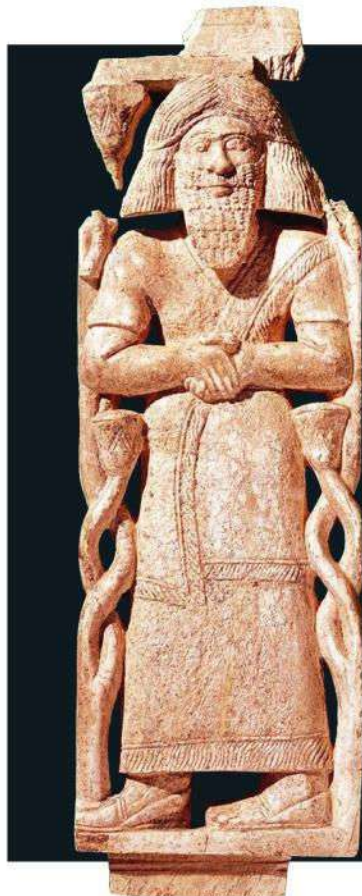
Bible, after the reign of Solomon (end of the 10th century BC) it split into two, with the northern half retaining the name Israel.

**Kingdom of Judah:** The more southerly of the two kingdoms that were formed when the Kingdom of Israel was divided in the 10th century BC. It took its name from the tribe of Judah.

**Sennacherib:** An Assyrian king who reigned from 704–681 BC.

**Tabernacle:** A tent that the Bible says was used to house the Ark of the Covenant by the Israelites before the construction of the Temple.





## 5 Hazael's conquest of the city of Gath

*Evidence from the siege shows the level of contemporary warfare*

Hazael, King of Aram Damascus, was perhaps the most important king in the southern Levant (the area covering modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan) during the second half of the ninth century BC. His military campaigns and exploits are often mentioned in the biblical text, as well as in Assyrian and Aramaic texts. Apparently, for a period of several decades, Hazael's kingdom dominated the entire region.

Hazael was a dominant ruler, fighting the kings of Judah and Israel and gaining vast territories

In recent years, impressive evidence of his military campaigns has been discovered. In particular, archaeological evidence of the siege and subsequent destruction of Philistine Gath (modern Tell es-Safi in central Israel) demonstrates the enormous extent of his warfare and its effect on the various kingdoms and peoples in the ancient Levant. While the destruction of Gath is mentioned only briefly in the biblical text (half a verse in I Kings 12:17-18) – and in a rather matter-of-fact way – the enormous effect of this and other campaigns of Hazael is apparent.

## 6 The Tel Dan Aramaic inscription

*Is this the first mention of the House of David?*

Fragments of a monumental inscription, written on basalt in Aramaic, were discovered outside the gate of Iron Age Tel Dan in northern Israel in the mid-1990s. In this inscription, an Aramean king, most likely Hazael (see above), boasts of his military feats; among them, he credits himself with killing the kings of Israel and the 'House of David'.

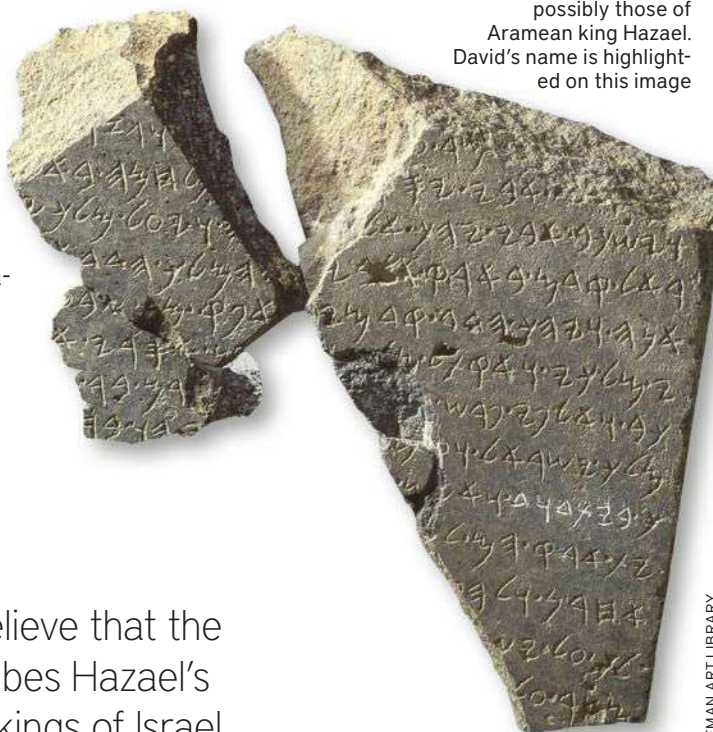
Most scholars believe that this inscription was written under the orders of Hazael around 840 BC and describes his victory over the kings of Israel (most likely Joram, son of Ahab) and the House of David (most likely Ahaziah, son of Joram). As such, it is seen as the earliest mention in an extra-biblical text of the name 'David' – specifically

referring to the Kingdom of Judah as the 'House of David' – some 150 years after the time of David. It is also seen as the first non-biblical evidence for the very existence of a historical David.

Other scholars have questioned this interpretation. A minority have debated whether it is a forgery, but this is seen as very unlikely. Others have suggested relating the inscription to Ben Hadad, the son of Hazael, and relating it to a slightly later stage.

Most scholars believe that the inscription describes Hazael's victory over the kings of Israel

Discovered in the mid-1990s, the inscription describes military victories, quite possibly those of Aramean king Hazael. David's name is highlighted on this image





# 7 The temple at Arad

*An intriguing discovery at a crucial Iron Age fort*

At the site of ancient Arad, in the north-eastern Negev desert in modern-day Israel, a fort dating to the Iron Age was discovered. The fort guarded an important east/west route from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean and the south-eastern flank of the Judahite kingdom.

In the midst of the fort, a small temple was found. This has elements reminiscent of cultic features mentioned in relationship to the biblical Tabernacle and the temple in Jerusalem, including being home to altars of various sizes.

It is one of the few temples relating to the Israelites/Judahites of the Iron Age that have been discovered in ancient Israel, and sheds important light on the cultic practices of these cultures and the fascinating question of the relationship between the temple in Jerusalem and other cultic centres. The temple went out of use, most likely during the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah (in the late eighth century/early ninth century BC), and may reflect a cultic reform during his reign which is mentioned in the biblical text (II Kings 18:3–4).



ABOVE: The ninth-century BC 'Holy of Holies' at the temple discovered in the fortifications at Arad.  
BELOW: An aerial view of the fortifications after a rare snowfall



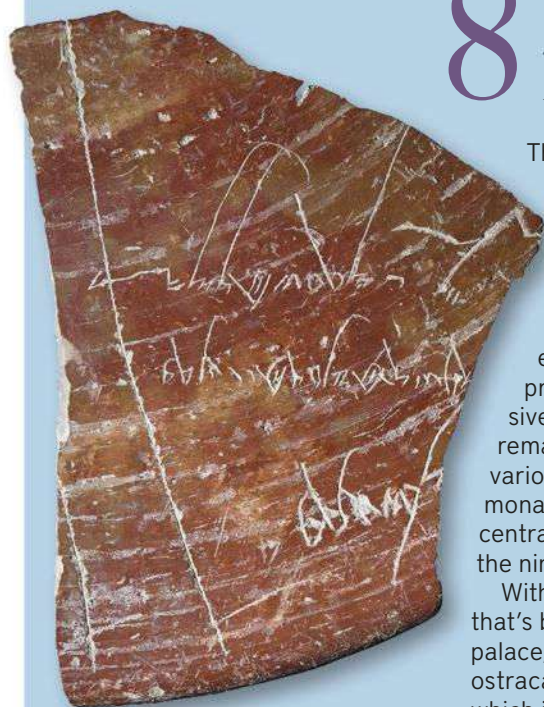
ALAMY





# 8 The ostraca of Samaria

*Inscribed pottery fragments reveal everyday Israelite life*



Many of the inscriptions include both a year and the name of either the supplier or recipient of the commodity

The city of Samaria, founded by King Omri, father of Ahab, was the capital of the Israelite kingdom from the ninth century BC until its destruction by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Archaeological excavations at the site have provided evidence of the impressive fortifications and palatial remains at the site, evidence of the various stages of the late Israelite monarchy and a reflection on the central role of this kingdom during the ninth and eighth centuries BC.

Within the remains of a building that's been identified as the royal palace, a collection of more than 100 ostraca (a fragment of pottery on which ink inscriptions were written) was discovered. These ostraca are most probably tax receipts or records of provisions sent to officials, and

date from the final years of the Israelite kingdom. Most often, the inscriptions mention a regnal year, the recipient/provider of the shipment and its origin, and in some, the commodity itself (wine or oil).

In addition to illuminating aspects relating to the Israelite kingdom in its last decades, including names, language and other facets, very interestingly some of the clans mentioned are similar to the names of the 'Daughters of Zelophad' (Numbers 26:28-34).

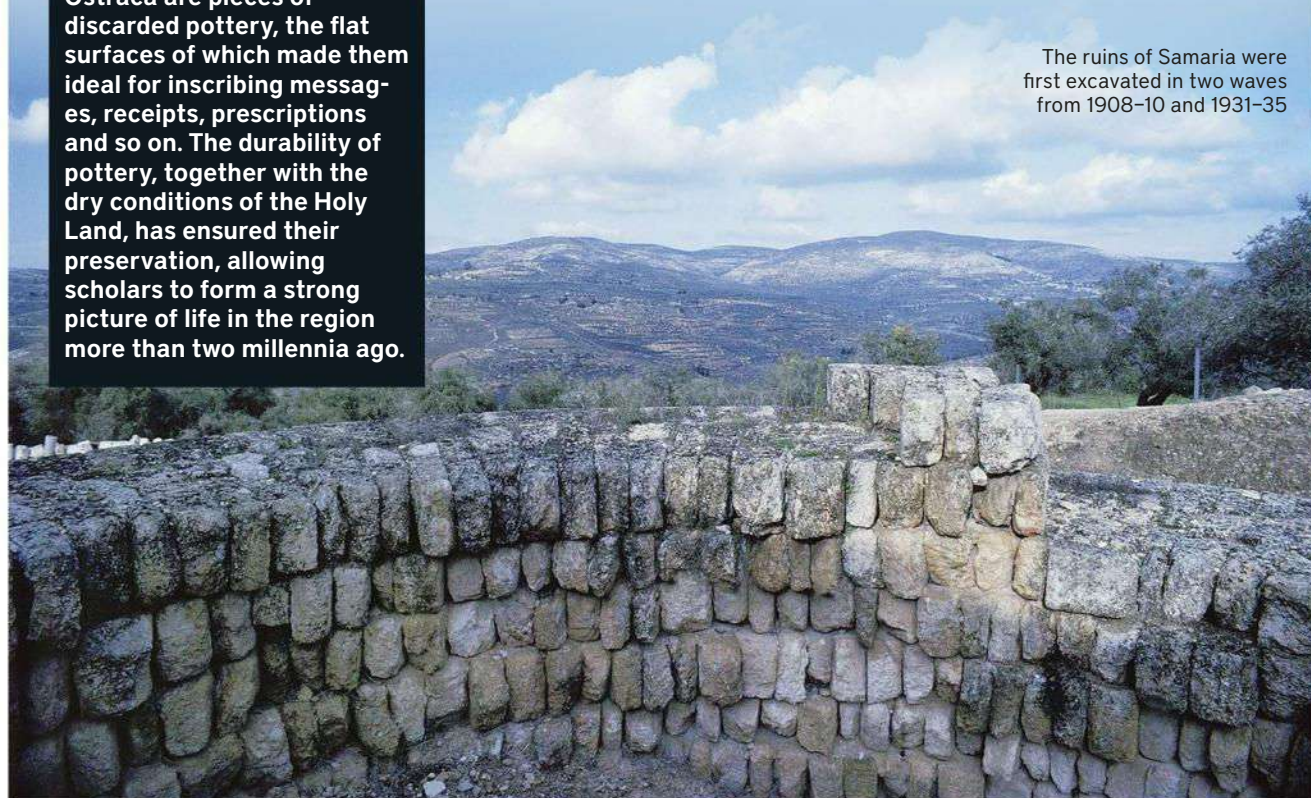
These ostraca are probably tax receipts or records of provisions sent to officials

## DID YOU KNOW...

### What are ostraca?

Ostraca are pieces of discarded pottery, the flat surfaces of which made them ideal for inscribing messages, receipts, prescriptions and so on. The durability of pottery, together with the dry conditions of the Holy Land, has ensured their preservation, allowing scholars to form a strong picture of life in the region more than two millennia ago.

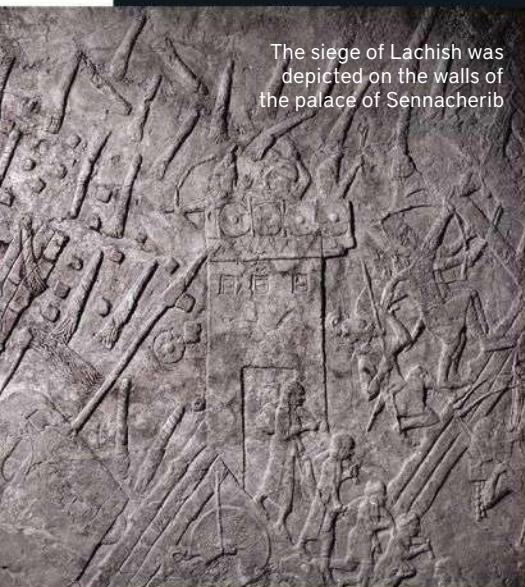
The ruins of Samaria were first excavated in two waves from 1908-10 and 1931-35





# 9 The conquest of Lachish and the discovery of letters

*These finds help to unravel the chronology of the late Iron Age*



The siege of Lachish was depicted on the walls of the palace of Sennacherib

Lachish was the second most important city in the Judahite kingdom during the Iron Age. As such, some of the most important finds relating to the Judahite kingdom were discovered in its excavations. Two finds are of particular importance. Impressive evidence of the siege and conquest of the city in the late eighth century BC was discovered, and this dovetailed with evidence both biblical (for instance, II Kings 18:14) and Assyrian (texts and royal reliefs) of the Assyrian conquest of Lachish during the campaign of Sennacherib in 701 BC.

The interface between the various types of evidence provides a solid foundation for the chronological and

biblical history of the late Iron Age.

The second find that's worthy of mention is a collection of ostraca (one of which is shown above) found in the city gate that was destroyed when the Babylonians conquered Lachish in 588/586 BC. The letters are written in biblical Hebrew in a dialect similar to the language of some of the late Iron Age prophetic books, such as certain parts of the book of Jeremiah.

The ostraca are either letters written to or by the commander of Lachish. They reflect the dramatic events of the very last days of the kingdom of Judah.

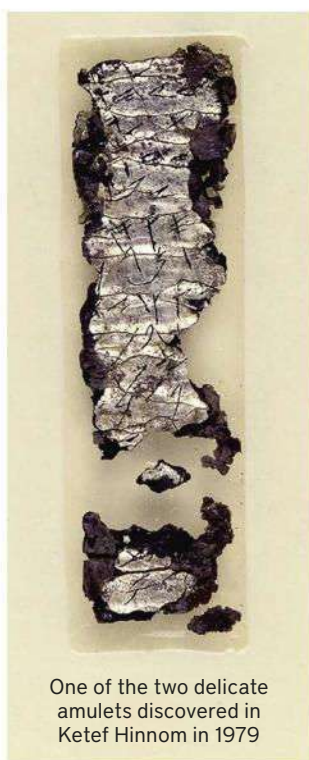


# 10 The earliest biblical textual remains

*The discoveries of the Ketef Hinnom amulets and the Dead Sea Scrolls*

The biblical text as we know it today is a complex set of documents that has been composed, collated and edited over a long period of time. Of particular importance are the earliest examples of biblical texts, whether fragmentary or more complete, which enable the reconstruction of the formation of these documents.

The two most important groups of biblical texts are the Ketef Hinnom amulets and Dead Sea Scrolls. The Ketef Hinnom amulets were discovered in a late Iron Age tomb to the west of the Old City of Jerusalem, and most scholars date them to the early sixth century BC (although some have suggested later datings). These two amulets, written



One of the two delicate amulets discovered in Ketef Hinnom in 1979

on small silver plaques, have on them texts that are very similar to several biblical passages.

In particular, Amulet 2 is strikingly similar to the "priestly benediction" of Numbers 6:24-26. While hardly proving that these biblical texts existed in entirety during the late Iron Age, they do indicate that portions of these texts were already known at the time.

The Dead Sea Scrolls number close to 1,000 documents, mainly written on parchment, in Hebrew, Aramaic and a few other languages. These were found in caves in the region of the Dead Sea in the mid-20th century, mostly around the site of Qumran. Dating from the late third

century BC until the first century AD, these represent a wide collection of texts, both biblical and non-biblical, most likely related to the sect of Essenes, who apparently resided in Qumran and its surroundings.

The Dead Sea Scrolls shed light on many aspects relating to Second Temple Jewish culture; they are the largest – and, in many cases, the earliest – examples of the various parts of the biblical texts.

As such, they provide evidence of relatively early stages of these texts' development, as well as revealing various versions, some of which were previously unknown. They also shed important light on the Essenes. ■





**TRIUMPHANT ARRIVAL**

This illustration, from a 12th-century Byzantine manuscript, shows Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday





A mosaic depicting bread and fish from the Church of the Multiplication, believed to be the location of the feeding of the 5,000

# THE LAND OF JESUS

Ruled by both Herod and Pontius Pilate, Judea became a Roman province in AD 6. **JOHN CURRAN** offers a snapshot of life in the region around the time of Jesus



S ometime in the year AD 26, a galley bearing Pontius Pilate, the fourth or fifth praefectus (or prefect) of Judea, made its way slowly past the two great breakwaters that protected the inner harbour of the city of Caesarea. If he had an eye for engineering, Pilate will have noticed that the most recent Roman technology had been used to provide a concrete base for the booms extending hundreds of feet into the sea. As his ship passed the port's lighthouse, Pilate will have looked up to see a shimmering temple to Rome and Augustus overlooking his arrival. Disembarking, he will have made his way the short distance to his official residence, a magnificently appointed house on a promontory projecting out into the eastern Mediterranean, laid out around a large fish-stocked pool and caressed by breezes drifting in from the sea.

Whether he realised it or not, Pilate had just taken over one of the most complex environments that Rome ever sought to govern. The symbols of Roman power, culture and technology belied a region scarred by civic and religious tensions and home to peoples with beliefs stranger than anything to be found in the new governor's experience.

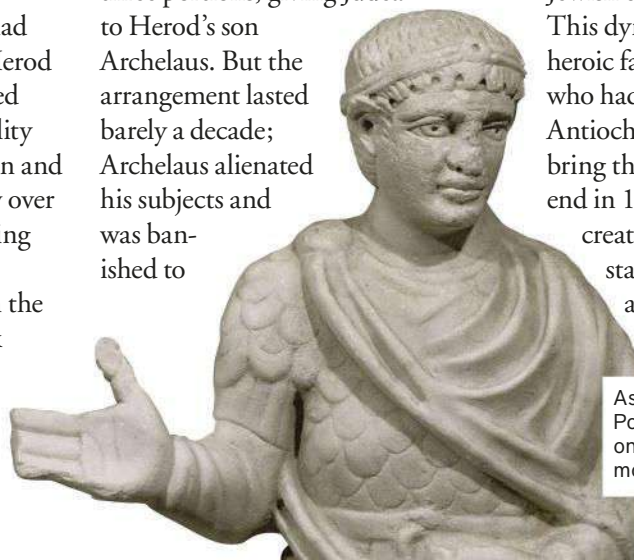
The recent history of Judea had been dominated by one man: Herod 'the Great'. Although he had died 30 years previously, his personality and legacy had shaped the region and continued to cast a long shadow over his former kingdom. As a cunning and ruthless regional official of modest pedigree, Herod had, in the 40s BC, caught the eye of Mark Antony, a Roman notoriously intrigued by exotic oriental

personalities. When Herod showed an aptitude for firm government, Antony made him king of the Jews in 40 BC.

Herod's tumultuous private life, however, bequeathed a host of problems to Rome. "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son!" was the response of Emperor Augustus to the cruelty of the king towards some of the children of his 10 wives. In the last years of his reign, and tormented by paranoia, Herod had drafted a number of contradictory wills. When he finally died in 4 BC, Augustus divided the dead king's lands into three portions, giving Judea to Herod's son Archelaus. But the arrangement lasted barely a decade; Archelaus alienated his subjects and was banished to

Gaul in western Europe in AD 6. The emperor decided against another Herodian prince and placed Judea under direct Roman government. Strictly speaking, it became an appendage of the great provincia of Syria to the north, governed by a senator of the highest standing. But Judea was clearly a peculiar place and needed careful handling, so a praefectus, subordinate to the governor and equestrian in rank, was installed.

What the Romans called 'Judea' had thus been the centrepiece of Herod's kingdom, but the king had himself supplanted a recent royal Jewish dynasty, the Hasmoneans. This dynasty had origins in the heroic family of Judas 'Maccabeus', who had defied the Hellenistic king Antiochus IV when he sought to bring the Jews' ancestral cult to an end in 167 BC. The Hasmoneans had created an independent Jewish state in the second century BC, annexing lands occupied by



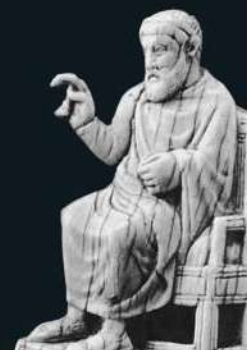
As prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate governed one of the Roman empire's most complex territories





#### GRAND DESIGN

This painting, by the 19th-century French artist James Tissot, shows Jerusalem and the temple of Herod (who is pictured below) at the time of Christ. Building began c22 BC and a workforce of around 10,000 is believed to have been utilised for the temple's construction, an estimated 1,000 of whom were priests who had retrained as stonemasons. Only they were permitted to work on the inner temple



the many Greeks who had been living there for centuries and forcing other peoples of the region to convert to Judaism or leave. But memories were long: the Greeks had not forgotten their treatment at the hands of the Hasmoneans, while the Samaritans, living only 30 miles north of Jerusalem, still resented the destruction of their own temple by the Jews in 129 BC. At the same time, other ancient gentile communities brooded resentfully on their forced abandonment of ancestral homes.

What had given the Jews such conviction in constructing a state for themselves was a remarkable relationship with the god who lived among them. They were an unswervingly monotheistic people – another oddity

to Romans like Pilate – and worshipped their god in his only dwelling place on earth: the Temple in Jerusalem. There, animal sacrifices of thanksgiving or expiation for infringements of his law took place, conducted by thousands of priests and overseen by the imposing figure of the god's own high priest.

**B**ut Judaism also accommodated those expressing their own distinctive forms of piety. A group known as the Pharisees had developed meticulous traditions that allowed their devotion to be expressed in every aspect of life, from strict hand-washing before meals to the

symbolic joining together of homes so that the Sabbath could be observed by families together. Beyond death, they believed that God would reunite body and soul.

On the other hand, another group – the Sadducees – had little interest in special traditions or resurrection; they seem to have been interested in upholding the institutions of the Jews, above all the Temple. The only high priest of the Jews whose religious outlook can be ascertained with any clarity was a Sadducee, Ananus, the man who would bring about the death of James, the brother of Jesus, in AD 62.

In stark contrast, down in the Jordan valley, living at Qumran on the north-west edge of the Dead Sea, was a small community of Jews observing the strictest religious discipline, intensively studying the law of Moses and the prophets of God. For them, God's temple was in the hands of unworthy custodians and he was set to seize it back soon in a cataclysmic intervention in human history.

## Herod's personality and legacy continued to cast a long shadow over his former kingdom



# Mapping it out

*Six culturally significant locations in the Holy Land*



An artist's impression of Caesarea, founded by Herod as the port of his kingdom

## 1 Caesarea

The administrative capital of Judea and an overwhelmingly gentile city with the civic amenities – circus, theatre and marketplace – that made it congenial to the Romans as the seat of government.

## 2 Jerusalem

The site of Herod's temple, an imposing building set in the centre of a vast paved precinct lined with porticoes. Through the thousands of priests serving there, Jews offered sacrifices to their god in the temple in fulfillment of the law. At the annual pilgrimage festivals of Judaism, the 'Temple Mount' was visited by hundreds of thousands of visitors.

## 3 Talpiot

Three miles south of Jerusalem's old city, this was the site of the apparently sensational discovery in 1980 of 10 ossuaries (containers of human remains) from a family tomb, within one of which were identified the remains of "Jesus son of Joseph". Other ossuaries identified a "Miriam" ("Mary"), "Mariamne" (Greek "Mary") and "Jose" ("Joseph"). Some asserted that the family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth had been recovered, but rigorous academic enquiry has highlighted serious flaws in the attribution.

It was claimed this ossuary from the first century AD contained the bones of Christ



## 4 Sepphoris

Not mentioned in the New Testament, Sepphoris lay just four miles from Nazareth. It was self-consciously a Greek settlement set in countryside settled by Jewish farmers and labourers. Its inhabitants took no part in the war of the Jews against Rome (AD 66-74) and the town styled itself Eirenopolis – 'city of peace' – on its coinage (as on the coin above).



Under Roman Procurators  
Herod Antipas

0 30miles  
0 40km



## 5 Qumran

The site of an extreme ascetic community of Jews living under a strict regime of manual labour, study and the pursuit of ritual purity. Frequently identified as the Essenes, the Qumranites anticipated a divine intervention in history that would see the Jerusalem temple restored to a fully legitimate high priest. The settlement faced a serious threat, perhaps during the rebellion of the Jews against Rome (AD 66–74), forcing its members to deposit the scrolls of their library in caves overlooking the site. These were recovered in 1947 and are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls (pictured below).



## 6 Masada

The most dramatically situated of Herod the Great's residences. Remains of amphorae (ceramic pots) containing imported Italian wine show that the king had adopted Roman tastes. At the time of the Jewish revolt against Rome, the palace was seized by rebels who killed themselves rather than fall into Roman hands.



A ceramic fragment, possibly from an amphora, found at Masada

Also contemplating conflict was an altogether more worldly sect which the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus called a "fourth philosophy" among the Jews. Harking back to the great periods of Jewish independence, they bridled at the subjection of the Jews to government by anyone else. They had defied the Roman census that had accompanied Judea's annexation in AD 6 and, though their rebellion had been violently suppressed, they retained a burning desire to achieve the political independence that would secure total religious freedom.

Economics were on their side. Jews of Judea had to pay 'tithes' from the produce of their land to the temple authorities for maintenance and the upkeep of its priests. Taxes were due to Rome and goods in transit were also subject to tolls. The building projects of the time, above all those of Herod's temple (completed finally only in the AD 60s) and the luxurious houses of wealthy Jews in Jerusalem, created a demand for craftsmen: carpenters, stonemasons, potters, glass-blowers and plasterers who could earn a reasonable living – and all of whom needed feeding. In the countryside, wheat, olive and vines were cultivated on thousands of smallholdings.

But when, as with everywhere else in the ancient Mediterranean, the bulk of the population lived just above or on the poverty line, there could be serious hardship if things went wrong. A poor harvest might force a farmer out of land ownership and into tenancy; unpaid wages could lead to risky loans at exorbitant rates of interest; and the ever-present danger of illness could rapidly propel a working-age man and his family into destitution.

# The building projects being undertaken created a high demand for craftsmen

People who had tumbled to the bottom of society were not hard to find. Some ended up abandoning settled society altogether and became bandits, waylaying those on the humble roads of Judea. These are the people who populated the parables of Jesus of Nazareth.

But these parables were tales from the countryside. Literally towering over the rural poor was the great city of Jerusalem. The Romans might have governed from Caesarea but, for pious Jews, the centre of the world was Jerusalem. The most audacious of Herod's projects had been a spectacular remodelling of the temple that stood on the hill supposedly chosen by Abraham for the sacrificing of Isaac. The massive undertaking that had begun around 23/22 BC required the meticulous training of priests as masons and master-craftsmen to ensure that Herod's temple should be the work of the purest hands.

On a vast platform of rock, Herod constructed one of the most remarkable buildings of the ancient world. Later rabbis recalled a saying of the time: "Whoever has not seen Herod's temple has never seen anything beautiful." The temple was reached via a number of enormous stairways above and below ground level. The sanctuary of the Holy of Holies occupied the central space of the enormous terrace and around it ran airy porticoes hosting teachers,





preachers and currency-converters exchanging foreign coins for Tyrian shekels, the only denomination the temple treasury would accept.

On the great annual festivals like Passover, Jewish pilgrims from all over the ancient world flooded up and into the city. Jerusalem was packed for days on end with people purifying themselves in one of the thousands of ritual baths to be found in the city. At Passover, the streets were thronged with fathers bringing lambs to the temple to be ritually sacrificed, their meat returned to families for the celebration of God's deliverance of his people from Egypt.

It was particularly important for the Roman prefect to be present on these occasions to ensure that order was maintained. He travelled to Jerusalem and stayed for the duration in one of Herod's old palaces in the west of the city. With fewer than 1,000 soldiers at his disposal, a highly visible presence was required.

Adjoining Herod's temple, the king had constructed a great solid tower known as the 'Antonia', which housed a resident cohort of Judea's security forces drawn from gentile communities. At festival time the cohort deployed along the roofs of the porticoes and overlooked proceedings in the temple. Soldiers, however, are not always the most sensitive peace-keepers. Under the governor Ventidius Cumanus (in office between AD 48 and 52), one exposed himself obscenely to the Jews in



Jewish pilgrims in their tens of thousands would descend on Jerusalem during festivals such as Passover

the great court below, sparking a furious riot and a stampede that left thousands dead.

During high festivals, Jerusalem was thus a bustling, bewildering mix of people and languages. It was host, too, to powerful emotions: streams of pious Jews ascending the Temple Mount were a dramatic manifestation of God's people at worship and a reminder to some that a great destiny awaited them. Others wearied of the pomp of the high priests and their attendants, while some watched gentile troops deployed on the porticoes and longed for political independence. Not infrequently, there would be a disturbance in the crowd, a voice raised or an urgent call to repentance by some figure overwhelmed by the occasion. It was in the interests of many observers, both Jew and gentile, to identify the speaker – particularly if he came from Galilee.

Galilee lay beyond formal Roman control. It was governed by another of Herod's sons, Herod Antipas, and,

like his father, Antipas harboured Hellenic pretensions. He sponsored buildings, possibly including an early version of the theatre still preserved at the site of Sepphoris. He also founded an entirely new city, Tiberias, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which was laid out in Greek fashion with intersecting streets. The work at Sepphoris provided much needed work to Jewish craftsmen, including carpenters, and lay only four miles from Nazareth. Anyone learning their trade there would have been glad of the work, while feeding Tiberias was a welcome task for the fishermen living in places like Capernaum.

But Galilee had a bad reputation. Those who had resisted the Roman census in AD 6 had been based there; pious Jews of Jerusalem regarded Jews from Galilee as of only recent pedigree. Too many of them descended from those 'judaised' by the Hasmonaeans less than a century before and had the reputation of being lax in their observance of the law.

To make matters worse, the Galileans had a weakness for charismatic and unconventional teachers, healers and self-styled 'prophets'. The rabbis preserved tales of Galilean 'holy men' living in and around the time of Jesus, men like Honi 'the circle-drawer' who, in a time of drought, had drawn a line around himself and compelled God to send rain. Galilee was seen as home to the gullible and the dangerous.

John's Gospel reports that some who heard Jesus preaching in Jerusalem could hardly contain their incredulity, posing a question that detained the high priests, many of the Jews and, fatefully, Pontius Pilate himself. It's a question that has echoed down the ages: "Surely the Saviour isn't going to come from Galilee, is he?" ■

## During high festivals, Jerusalem was a bustling, bewildering mix of people and languages

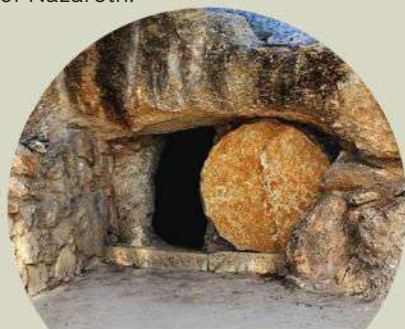


# Bones, boxes and boundaries

*More fascinating aspects of life in Judea at the time of Jesus*

## "They found the stone rolled away from the tomb..."

The Jews of Jerusalem buried their dead in tombs cut into the rock upon which the city was built. Corpses were dressed for burial and interred in the galleries, before the entrances were sealed with stones. Months later, when the flesh had decayed, the bones were collected, deposited in bone-boxes, known as ossuaries, and placed back in the tombs. One ossuary, discovered in 1990, identified the remains within as those of Joseph, son of Caiaphas, the latter name being mentioned in the Gospels as the name of the high priest who interrogated Jesus of Nazareth.



Jerusalem's Jews buried their dead in tombs cut into the rock, as shown in this modern re-creation

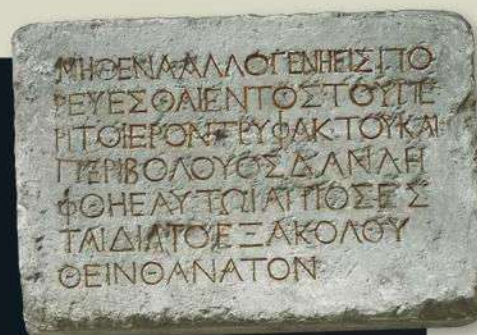


## Pilate humiliated?

Pilate endured a difficult relationship with the Jews, repeatedly attempting to show them who was in charge. After one insensitive display of Roman military symbols in Jerusalem, he was reprimanded by the emperor Tiberius himself. An inscription recovered in Caesarea in 1961 (see above) records him dedicating some unknown object called a "Tiberieum" in the city. Was it a gesture to salve his sense of embarrassment?

## On sacred ground

The 'balustrade inscription' was a notice written in Greek and placed on the entrance to the court of the Israelites in the Temple of Jerusalem. It marked the boundary beyond which no gentile could pass, and read: "No outsider shall enter the protective enclosure around the sanctuary. And whoever is caught will only have himself to blame for the ensuing death."

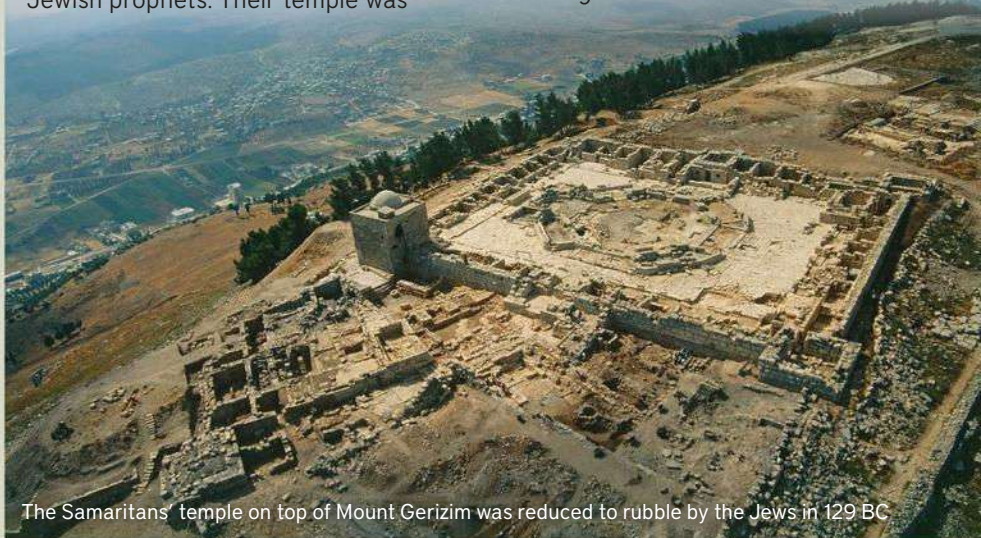


A replica of an inscribed limestone that was found in 1871. The original is in Istanbul's Archaeological Museum

## The bad Samaritans

Like the Jews, the Samaritans had a god whom they worshipped on their holy mountain of Gerizim. They observed the law of Moses, but did not venerate the writings of later Jewish prophets. Their temple was

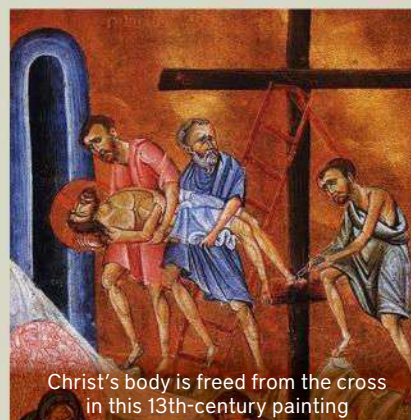
destroyed by the Jews in 129 BC. Shortly after the creation of the Roman province of Judea in AD 6, Samaritans had their revenge, stealing into the Jerusalem temple and scattering human bones there, desecrating the site.



The Samaritans' temple on top of Mount Gerizim was reduced to rubble by the Jews in 129 BC

## "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree..."

Crucifixion was a notorious means of exemplary execution in Roman law. It was reserved for slaves and foreigners guilty of serious crimes. In 1968, the remains of Yehohanan, the son of Hagakol, were recovered from an ossuary in Jerusalem and revealed that his feet had been nailed to a wooden post. The bones in his arms also bore traces of penetration by nails and his fibulae had been broken, seemingly to bring about a swift death.



Christ's body is freed from the cross in this 13th-century painting






A mosaic of the Virgin Mary and child from the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth (see page 44)

# Treasures *of the* Holy Land

In every era, emperors and kings have been allured by the Holy Land. This small strip of land has been conquered by the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, crusaders, Ottomans and the British empire, to name but a few. Each conquest made its mark, leaving behind many historic sites of significance.

**DAN SAVERY RAZ** picks out 10 of the most inspiring





It may not be the prettiest church in the world, but the Holy Sepulchre is one of the busiest

A young boy is bathed in sunlight as he watches the Palm Sunday procession in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

# 1 Church of the Holy Sepulchre Jerusalem

*This is believed to be the location of Jesus's crucifixion and burial in Jerusalem*

Out of all the churches in Jerusalem, and there are plenty of them, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is considered the holiest. Hidden in a labyrinth of narrow alleyways in the old city, it houses the final five of the 14 Stations of the Cross, the series of images of Christ's crucifixion.

The Holy Sepulchre is one of three major churches founded by Helena,

the mother of Emperor Constantine, who travelled to the Holy Land some 300 years after the crucifixion; the other two churches are located in Bethlehem and Nazareth. Helena declared the site to be Calvary (derived from the Latin word for 'skull') when the grave of Joseph of Arimathea and three crosses were found during excavations.

The original church was completed in AD 335, though most of what stands today dates from the crusader period church, restored in 1810. While not the prettiest church, it is one of the world's busiest, with thousands of tourists lighting candles near the rock tomb and regular processions held by Coptic, Greek Orthodox and Franciscan monks.



## 2 **Avdat** Negev

*The home of the nomadic Nabataean tribe in the middle of the Negev desert*

After Petra, Avdat was the second-most important stopping point on the network of lucrative spice and incense routes at one time spanning the Roman empire, the Middle East, north-east Africa and Asia. The Nabataeans, an Arab tribe who spoke Aramaic, the lingua franca of the time, built the city in the third-century BC. Despite the harsh desert conditions, the Nabataeans developed a sophisticated system of irrigation here and even cultivated grapes for wine. Avdat, also known as Obodat and named after the

Nabataean monarch Obodos II, was annexed by the Romans for its trade potential and flourished in the Byzantine period until it was deserted after an earthquake in AD 630.

Probably the best-preserved Nabataean ruins in Israel (others include Mamshit and Shivta), Avdat boasts a Roman bathhouse, catacombs, several Byzantine churches and an ancient winepress. It was also the location for the filming of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* movie.

Avdat was the second-most important stopping point on the lucrative spice route between Rome and India

AKG IMAGES





The impressive ruins of Avdat  
were declared a World Heritage  
Site by Unesco in 2005





# 3 The Western Wall Jerusalem

*Israel's rock of ages remains the most sacred site in the Jewish faith*

At first glimpse, the Western Wall, called HaKotel in Hebrew, looks just like any other fortress wall. Yet, for 2,000 years it was the symbol of Jewish yearning. The exact origins of the wall are a hotly debated topic, but this is said to be where King Solomon built the original Temple of the Israelites, destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC and rebuilt 70 years later. The Romans burned down the Second Temple in AD 70, leaving only a supporting wall which, during the Jewish exile, became a place of pilgrimage where Jews would lament the destruction of the Temple, earning it the nickname the 'Wailing Wall'. Only in 1967, when the modern state of Israel defeated Jordan, Egypt and Syria in the Six-Day War, did Israeli paratroopers regain access to the Western Wall. Today, it is a place of prayer, open to all faiths, yet heavily secured.

At the Western Wall, more than 50,000 Jewish worshippers attend the annual priestly blessing during the Passover holiday

GETTY IMAGES



## 4 The Church of the Nativity Bethlehem

*It feels like Christmas every day at Bethlehem's world-famous grotto*

Whether or not this is the birthplace of Jesus, the Church of the Nativity is a remarkable heritage site. It's the oldest continuously operating church in the world, commissioned in AD 326 by Helena, Emperor Constantine's mother. Constantine famously converted to Christianity, thus changing the face of the Roman empire.

Like many other historic sites in this part of the world, it is a mish-mash of Byzantine, crusader and modern architecture. Inside, it includes the

remains of Constantine's original fourth-century mosaic floor, along with red-and-white limestone columns dating from the sixth century, when Emperor Justinian rebuilt the church. Popular with tour groups, the Grotto of the Nativity has a 14-pointed silver star where Jesus was said to have been born. Although situated in the troubled West Bank region, the church is still a major place of pilgrimage for Christians and world leaders; Barack Obama made a whistle-stop here in 2013.



Franciscan priests pray before the Bethlehem Star at the Grotto at the Church of the Nativity

## 5 Old Jaffa near Tel Aviv

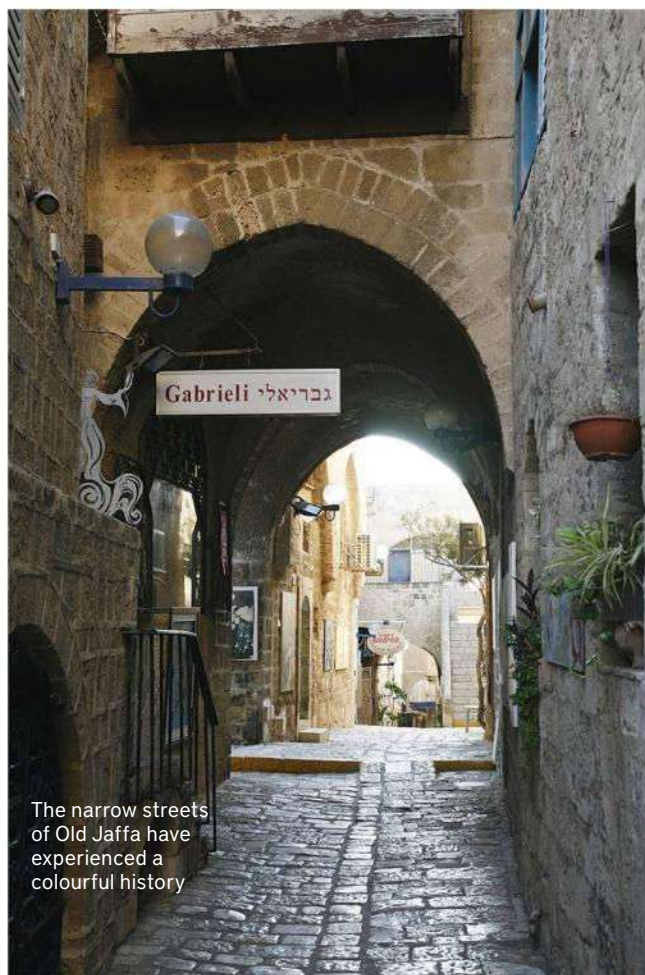
*The biblical port that's seen ships come and go for more than 4,000 years*

Legend has it that Old Jaffa, called Joppa in the Bible, was founded and named after Japeth, son of Noah. Jaffa is mentioned in the Bible (2 Chronicles 2:16) as the place where cedar trees of Lebanon were imported to build Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. The town was later conquered by the Assyrians, Persians and Hellenistic empires, although was neglected by the Romans who built a new port in Caesarea. Notable sights in Jaffa

include an underground Hellenistic-era excavation site, Simon the Tanner's House (where St Peter restored Tabitha to life in the New Testament) and St Peter's Monastery, a Franciscan church built in the 1890s on the ruins of the crusader citadel.

In recent years, the port's empty shipping hangars (once home to Jaffa oranges) have been redeveloped as cafes, shops and art galleries, where Jews and Arabs exist peacefully together.

The port is now a hub of cafes and shops where Jews and Arabs exist peacefully together



The narrow streets of Old Jaffa have experienced a colourful history



## 6 **Caesarea** northern Israel

*Herod's hub by the sea was home to the Indianapolis of ancient Rome*

Once a great port of the Mediterranean to rival Alexandria, Caesarea was the Roman capital of the Syria Palaestina province. Under King Herod's rule, a grandiose city was built for Augustus Caesar with a temple, palace, amphitheatre, theatre and markets. Completed after 12 years of back-breaking labour, Caesarea opened for

business (and pleasure) in 10 BC. Famous for its ancient hippodrome – the Indianapolis of its day – this was where chariot races and public tortures entertained up to 10,000 spectators.

The city flourished in the Byzantine period, until it was mostly destroyed in AD 640 by the Arab conquest. In the 12th century, the

crusaders took the city and discovered a green-glass chalice they mistakenly believed to be the Holy Grail, now kept in Genoa, Italy. Today, Caesarea is a national park with arches, pillars and mosaics surrounding the hippodrome, while the southern amphitheatre has been restored and is now used for concerts.





Crusaders discovered  
a green-glass chalice in  
Caesarea that they mistakenly  
believed to be the Holy Grail

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The southern amphitheatre at  
Caesarea still sees active service  
as the venue for numerous music  
concerts every year



## 7 The Basilica of the Annunciation Nazareth

*Nazareth's most notable landmark is the largest church in the Middle East*

The Basilica of the Annunciation looms large over the city of Nazareth in northern Israel. This vast hillside structure was built on what the Catholic church believes to be Mary's childhood house, the location where she received the message she would give birth to Jesus. The original shrine, a small chapel built in a cave, was built in the mid-fourth century. The crusaders

built a larger church here, which was destroyed by the Mamluks in 1260 and the Franciscans later built a small structure to enclose the grotto.

The current basilica was consecrated in 1969 and incorporates the earlier lower-level Byzantine-era grotto. Its dome is shaped to resemble a white lily and its courtyard walls display multicultural portrayals of



Mary cradling Jesus. In Greek Orthodox tradition, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary while she was collecting water from a well and the Greek church is built at a location on the other side of the city.

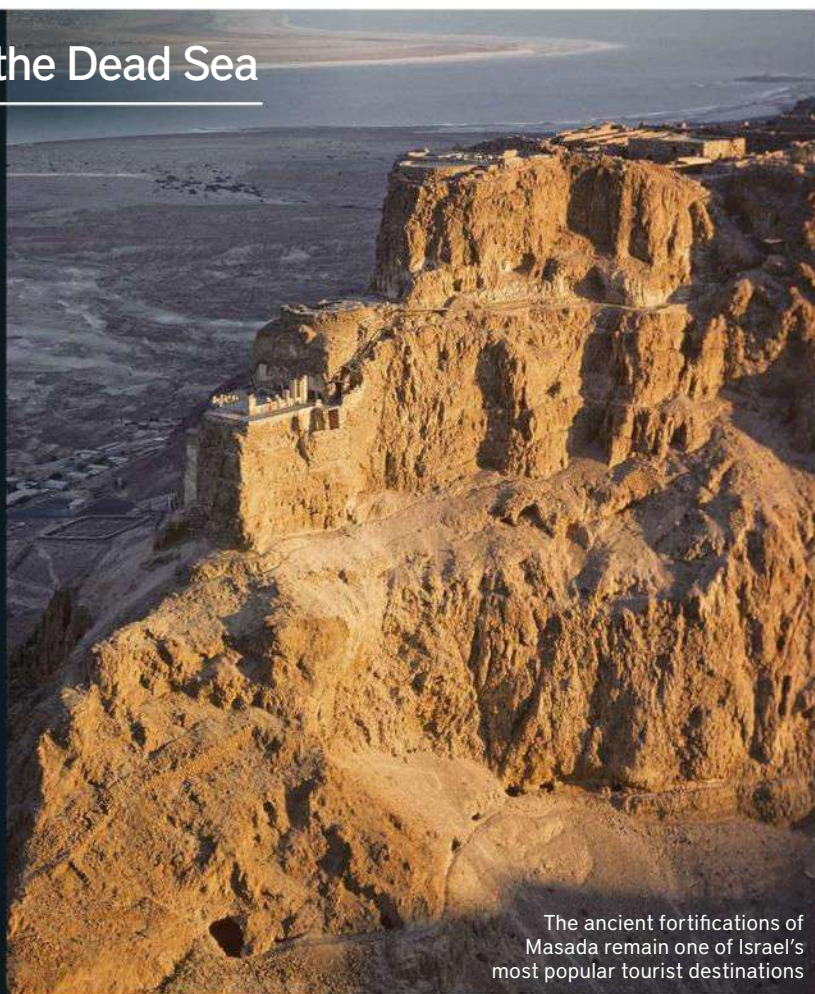
Saturday mass in the Basilica of the Annunciation

## 8 Masada near the Dead Sea

*Mystical mountain-top ruins overlooking the Dead Sea*

Many a tale has been told about Masada, a red-rock mountain in the Judean desert synonymous with perhaps the most famous mass suicide in history. Herod the Great built palaces on top of this isolated rocky plateau and fortified it around 31 BC. It was overcome by a group of Jewish zealots (known as sikrikim in Hebrew) in AD 66. In AD 73, after the Romans had destroyed most of Jerusalem, almost 1,000 sikrikim made their last stand at Masada.

Surrounded by the Roman empire's X Legion, they chose to die rather than become slaves. When the Romans reached the top of the mountain, they found everyone dead, except for two women and five children. Masada now has a museum exhibiting Roman artefacts and a laser-light show at night. Visitors can either climb the mountain at sunrise or choose to take the easier cable-car option.



The ancient fortifications of Masada remain one of Israel's most popular tourist destinations

CORBIS



## 9 **Nebi Shu'eib** near Tiberias

*Jethro's tomb and the battlefield where the crusaders were crushed*

Less familiar than many of the other treasures of the Holy Land, Nebi Shu'eib has an extraordinary story nonetheless. The most sacred place for the modern Druze tribe, an Arab sect separate from Islam, Nebi Shu'eib is said to house the traditional tomb of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who they believe to be the founder of monotheism.

Inside, the chamber housing the tomb dates back to the third century, although most of the current building is from 1880. It was built at the foot of the imposing 'Horns of Hattin' rock formation overlooking Lake Galilee where, in 1187, Saladin, the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria,

A less familiar Holy Land treasure, Nebi Shu'eib still has an extraordinary story

defeated the crusaders. The loss of this battle brought about the 1st Kingdom of Jerusalem's collapse and triggered the Third Crusade.

Today, the site resembles a large mosque with a courtyard and is a spectacular vantage point for hikers in the Galilee region.

Nabi Shu'eib is believed to be the location of the tomb of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law



# 10 Dome of the Rock Jerusalem

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*The golden shrine that shines all over the world*

Aside from being one of the most photographed and eye-catching buildings on Earth, the Dome of the Rock (Qubbet al-Sakhra in Arabic) is all about location. Built atop the Temple Mount, Jews believe this was the site where Abraham bound his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God, while Muslims claim

this was the spot where the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven. Underneath the dome lies the rock which, according to the Qur'an, wanted to join Muhammad in heaven and rose from the ground.

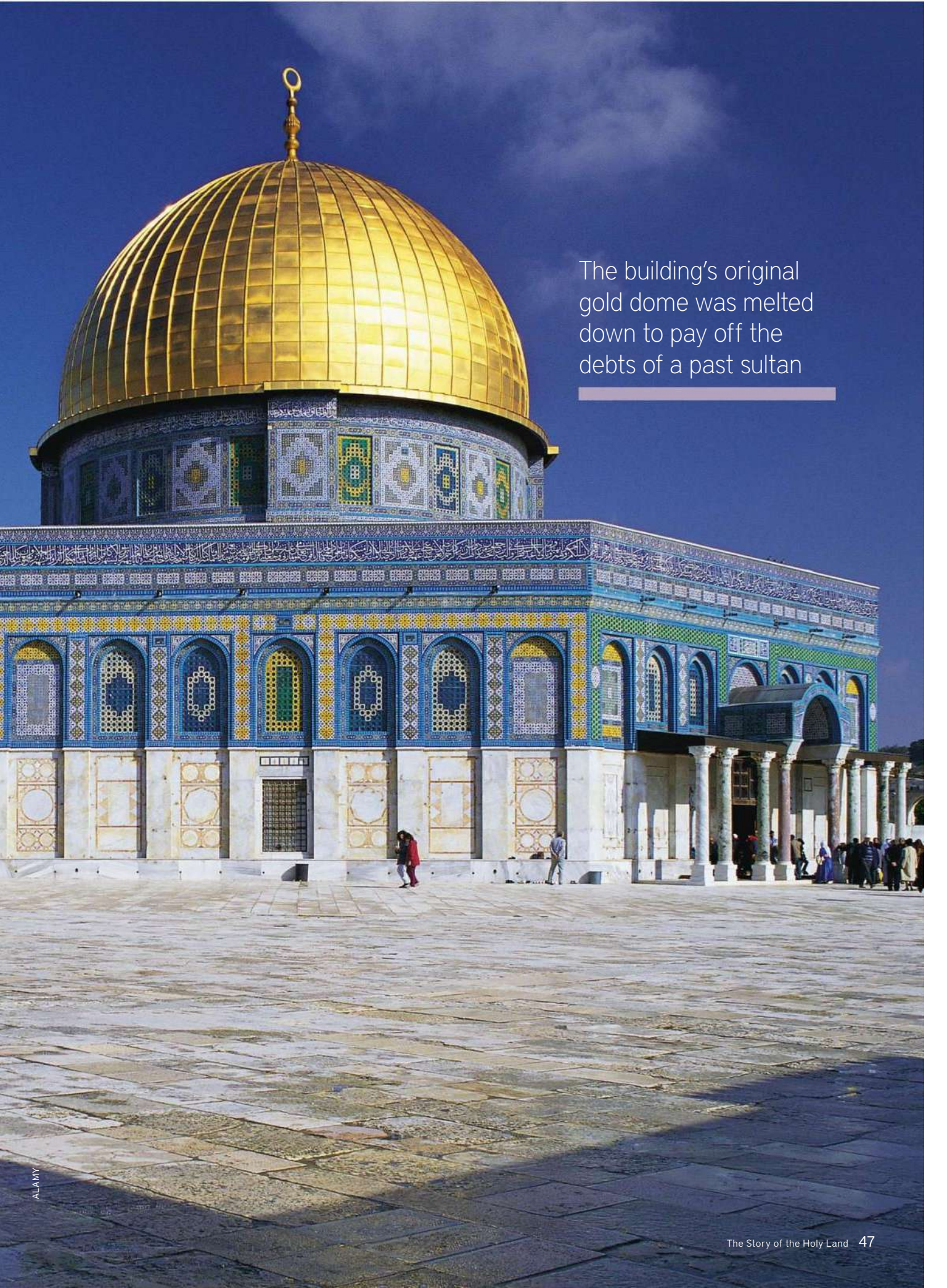
The Dome was built between AD 688 and 691 under the rule of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan to

compete with the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The original golden dome was melted down to pay debts and King Hussein of Jordan donated the 1.3mm of gold that covers the entire roof today. Like Mecca, the Dome of the Rock is not a mosque but a shrine. Entry is only allowed for Muslims. ■



The Dome of the Rock is situated in a location in Jerusalem that's of deep significance to Jews and Muslims alike





The building's original gold dome was melted down to pay off the debts of a past sultan



An aerial photograph of Jerusalem, showing the Old City walls and surrounding urban areas. The image is used as a background for the text.

# LANDO

THE RELIGIONS THAT LAID CLAIM TO THE LAND

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+ How **ISLAMIC CONQUESTS** drove back the forces of Rome

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+ Medieval **CRUSADERS**: conflict and trade in uneasy measure

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+ **JERUSALEM**, a look at the roots of the world's most contested city

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+ The earliest steps towards building the **ZIONIST** movement

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# FAITH

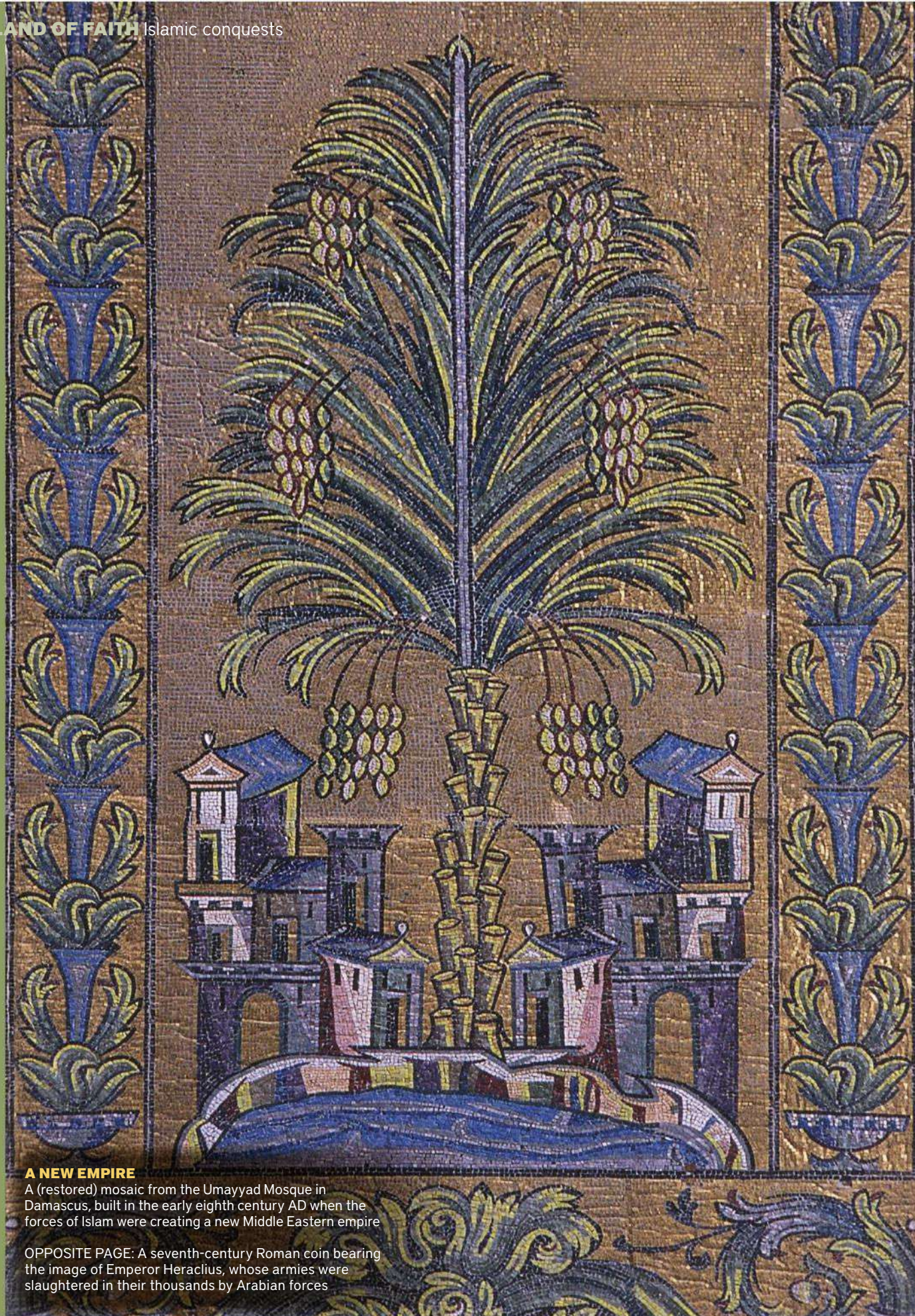
GOERG GERSTER-PANOS PICTURES

## **GOLDEN DOME**

Jerusalem's magnificent seventh-century Dome of the Rock, enshrining the rock from which Muhammad was said to have ascended to heaven







#### A NEW EMPIRE

A (restored) mosaic from the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, built in the early eighth century AD when the forces of Islam were creating a new Middle Eastern empire

OPPOSITE PAGE: A seventh-century Roman coin bearing the image of Emperor Heraclius, whose armies were slaughtered in their thousands by Arabian forces





# *The* Crescent *and the* Sword

During the seventh century, the Prophet Muhammad's campaigns unified Arabian tribes, who conquered the largest empire the world had ever known.

**ANDREW MARSHAM** assesses the place of the Holy Land in the Islamic conquests



“And we saw... on 20 August in the year 947 [AD 636] there gathered in Gabitha... the Romans. And a great many people were killed among the Romans – some 50,000...”

These words are inscribed in the margin of a copy of the gospels of Matthew and Mark, now held by the British Library in London. The note describes the slaughter of the eastern Roman army in the valley of Yarmuk, on the borders of modern Syria, Jordan and Israel, in the summer of AD 636.

The badly faded note was most likely composed by a monk who knew he was witnessing momentous events. The eastern Roman or ‘Byzantine’ army had been sent into the region by the Emperor Heraclius, who ruled between AD 610 and 641, in an attempt to halt the sudden expansion of tribes from the Arabian peninsula. The tribes of this vast desert region beyond Rome’s borders to the south (modern Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Gulf states) had suddenly achieved an unprecedented unity and had repeatedly defeated Roman armies in 634 and 635.

Heraclius’s deployment of the Roman army in 636 was in vain. The Romans were routed and thousands were slaughtered as they fled, with many falling to their deaths in the steep-sided ravines of Yarmuk. This crushing defeat opened northern Syria to the Arabian tribes, where they again defeated the Roman army near Damascus. (Syria is used here in the historical sense – that is, modern Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.)

Legend has it that as he departed after the defeats in Syria, Emperor Heraclius turned to the south one last

## Two great empires faced each other across the border for 400 years

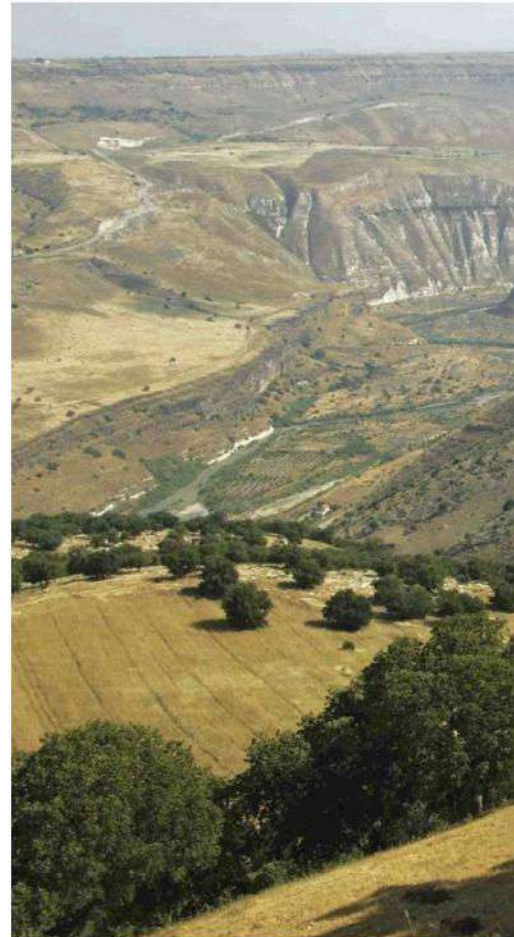
time and declared, “Rest in peace, Syria”, knowing that he would not return. Just six years before the disaster at Yarmuk, on Easter Day 630, Heraclius had entered Jerusalem in triumph, celebrating the recapture of the holiest city in Christendom from the ‘infidel’ Iranian empire (modern-day Iraq and Iran), with no inkling of what was to come.

By the early 600s, the two great empires of Iran and Rome had faced one another across their border in the Middle East for over 400 years. Each had adopted rival religious ideologies. The kings of Iran and their nobles were Zoroastrians, who venerated the god Ahura Mazda and his prophet Zoroaster. In contrast, the Roman emperors had imposed Christianity across the whole of their realm. The years 602–30 had seen a particularly bitter conflict in which the Iranians had come close to destroying the Roman empire before Heraclius had regained the initiative and driven the Iranian elite back to the gates of their capital in Iraq. A truce had been concluded overwhelmingly in favour of the Roman empire and – as defeat triggered civil war in Iran – the victorious Heraclius had headed for Jerusalem, now recaptured from recent Iranian occupation.

For the Christians of the seventh century, Jerusalem’s association with

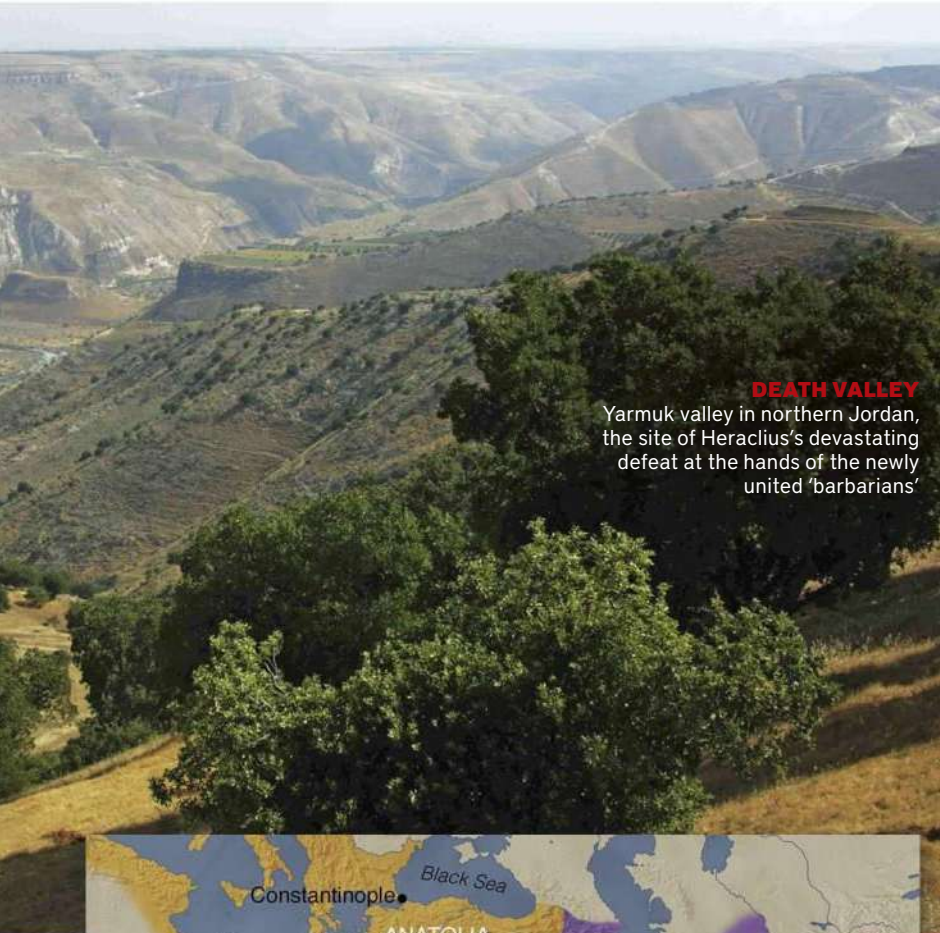
the final days of Jesus Christ and his resurrection made the city the most sacred location. But the whole city and the wider region resonated with spiritual potency for both Christians and Jews. Jerusalem was also the site of the ruins of the Second Jewish Temple, destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. As well as being the city of King David and King Solomon, Jerusalem was where God had created Adam, the first man, and it was where the Day of Judgement would take place. Beyond Jerusalem there were scores of other holy places scattered across Roman Syria. Among these was the great city of Damascus, site of the conversion of Saint Paul and the shrine to Saint John the Baptist; Tiberias, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, was a major centre of rabbinical Judaism in Syria; and Hebron, just south of Jerusalem, was venerated by both Jews and Christians as the site of the tomb of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

On Easter Day 630, neither Heraclius nor anyone else in Roman



PETER BOON/ MAPS: MARTIN SANDERS - MAPART.CO.UK





#### DEATH VALLEY

Yarmuk valley in northern Jordan, the site of Heraclius's devastating defeat at the hands of the newly united 'barbarians'



Syria would have imagined that six years later the region would once again slip from Roman control, this time not to the Iranians but to Arabian 'barbarians'. Although the Arabian tribes (they probably did not yet think of themselves collectively as "Arabs") posed a perennial threat to the security of the towns and villages in the frontier zone of the Syrian desert, they had never been the kind of united and effective force that could come close to challenging Roman imperial power. However, to the south, dramatic changes had been taking place and – largely beyond the horizons of Roman Syria – the Arabians were in fact, in 630, already more united than ever before.

Arabian unity had come about through the efforts of the Prophet Muhammad who had preached that he was a prophet in the tradition of the biblical prophets – among them Abraham, Moses and Jesus. His strictly monotheist message emphasised the indivisible oneness of God (in contrast to the Christian Trinity) and he forged a community of believers under his leadership at the towns of Mecca and Medina in the highlands of west Arabia. In time, this new form of belief in one god would become known as Islam – "submission to God" – and its followers as Muslims.

By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad's military campaigns and diplomatic missions had already created a federation of Arabian tribes across much of the peninsula. The federation grew further under those who succeeded to the leadership of the new religion after Muhammad's death. Continued expansion was in part motivated by the caliphs' (the Arabian →



# Syria, Egypt, Iraq and much of Iran were brought under Arabian rule

Muslims' rulers') need to retain control of the tribes by distributing the rewards of plunder and territory. They took advantage of the weakness of Rome and Iran in the wake of their recent cataclysmic war, overwhelming both Roman and Iranian defences in the 630s and 640s. Roman Syria and Egypt, as well as Iranian Iraq and much of Iran, were brought under Arabian rule. The Arabians and their defeated enemies widely understood their victories to be the work of God: for the Arabians, it was proof of God's support for Muhammad's message; for the defeated Christians of the Roman empire, it was proof, in words attributed to Emperor Heraclius, that their sins were being punished by "a scourge sent by Almighty God".

The conquests continued beyond Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran. By 670, Arabian garrisons had been established as far afield as modern Tunisia in north Africa and Turkmenistan in central Asia. There were setbacks and pauses – two bitter civil wars split the Muslim elite in the 650s and 680s (the roots of Sunni and Shia Islam) – but, nonetheless, the expansion of the Caliphate was on an unprecedented scale. By the 730s, it was the largest empire the world had thus far seen, stretching from modern Spain and Portugal in the west to Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan in the east; to the north, Muslim armies were campaigning in Georgia and Azerbaijan and, in the south, in Sudan. The Mediterranean Sea was also contested in naval battles with the eastern Roman empire, now reduced to little more than a city-state at Constantinople and its Balkan and Anatolian hinterlands.

How important the conquest of the Holy Land was to the Arabian Muslims,

and to what extent its sacred status motivated their conquest of it, remains open to question. Contemporary written sources for the first decades of the religious movement that became Islam are scarce. Some references in the Qur'an are understood to refer to Jerusalem; other reports also describe Muhammad initially instructing his followers to prostrate in prayer towards Jerusalem (like the Jews) before changing the direction towards Mecca; Muhammad's second successor, the caliph 'Umar, who ruled from 634–44, is said to have traveled from Arabia to the recently captured city of Jerusalem in 637, and to have made a processional entry into the city before personally negotiating its surrender with its patriarch (head bishop). Legendary accounts – which may nonetheless reflect the outlines of actual events – state that 'Umar refused to pray inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in order to protect the Christians from any future claims that it should be made into a mosque.

Probably, then, Jerusalem and the Holy Land had a special significance to Muhammad and his followers from the beginning.

However, what transformed the importance of Syria in Islam was the first great civil war within the new Arabian Muslim elite in the 650s. The victor in this battle for the Caliphate was one of the Holy Land's recent conquerors, a distant cousin of Muhammad by the name of Mu'awiya. Mu'awiya's support among the Arabic-speaking tribes of the Syrian desert had proved crucial in his victory over his rivals in the civil war, so he chose to retain Syria as his capital province when he took the Caliphate (he ruled from 661 to 680). He made Damascus – formerly a key Roman governmental centre – his administrative capital, but he also took a keen interest in Jerusalem and its sacred places, which were as resonant for the followers of Muhammad as for Jews and Christians. Mu'awiya seems to have developed the site of the city's first mosque, which had already been built near the ruins of the Jewish temple. When he was proclaimed caliph in 661, Mu'awiya made a processional circuit of Jerusalem's holy sites in a ceremony that resembled Heraclius's triumph in 630 and 'Umar's entry into the city in 637.

The dynasty founded by Mu'awiya, the Umayyads, emerged victorious from a second civil war in the 680s and retained Syria as their capital. They developed Jerusalem and Damascus into monumental imperial centres, reshaping them in ways that still give the cities their character today. At Jerusalem, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (reigned 685–705) constructed the Dome of the Rock near the centre of the Temple platform. With its golden dome, this octagonal sanctuary towers above the churches and synagogues of the old city and is one of the iconic images of modern Jerusalem. The



Carved stone at Khirbet al-Mafjar, in the West Bank, one of the palaces built by the Umayyads in the seventh and eighth centuries



Dome of the Rock is understood to commemorate the miraculous Night Journey and Ascension of Muhammad (*isra'* and *mi'raj*), when in one night he travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem and from there into the heavens, where he encountered Moses, Jesus and other prophets, before returning to Mecca before morning. However, the Dome probably had other important associations at the time – it could be seen as the restored temple of Solomon, to whom both the caliphs and Roman emperors liked to compare themselves, and it also stood as a prominent challenge to the city's Christian monuments.

A few years later, at Damascus, 'Abd al-Malik's son, al-Walid, who ruled for a decade from 705, made the very unusual step of violating the treaty with the city's population that guaranteed the security of their churches in order to requisition the monumental Church of Saint John the Baptist. There he built the Great Mosque of Damascus, which, like the Dome in Jerusalem, still stands today. The Great Mosque, with its marble columns and glittering wall mosaics, was also a challenge – an expression of Islam as an imperial monotheist faith that might supplant the dominance of Roman Christianity.



**THE GREAT MOSQUE** Built by Caliph al-Walid (reigned 705–15), it made a bold statement about Islamic power and affirmed Damascus's central place in the Umayyad Caliphate



**DOMES OF THE ROCK** Inside the magnificent dome on the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, completed in 692 by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik

**I**n 750, in a third civil war, the Umayyads were defeated. The family that replaced them, the Abbasids, moved the Caliphate's capital to Iraq, founding the new capital of Baghdad in 762. Syria was reduced again to the status of a province, and so its mosques and sanctuaries ceased to be the seats of imperial power. However, as the religion of Islam continued to take shape, Syria's cities and shrines retained great religious significance. Jerusalem was inextricably linked with the

prophets and patriarchs found in both the Bible and the Qur'an, and the mosque on the Temple Mount was widely believed to be the third most important shrine in Islam after Mecca and Medina. The Great Mosque at Damascus became associated with the veneration of the Prophet's grandson al-Husayn, as well as with John the Baptist, and with Jesus, who some believed would return at Damascus on the Day of Judgement.

For Syrian Muslims, these sacred sites and many others were a source of

local pride, and they composed written collections of religious traditions about them. Meanwhile, the majority of the population of Syria remained Christian during the first centuries of Islamic rule and there was also, as in Roman times, a very significant Jewish population. Jerusalem and Damascus and the numerous other sites of the Holy Land continued to draw Jewish, Christian and Muslim pilgrims from across early medieval Europe, north Africa and the Middle East. ■





# Traders *and* Crusaders

Relations between Muslims and Christians during the medieval period were characterised by more than just wanton violence, as **THOMAS ASBRIDGE** explains







The most arresting and immediate images conjured by the memory of the medieval crusades are dominated by war and violence: the First Crusaders wading ankle-deep in Muslim blood in 1099, after the barbaric slaughter that recovered Jerusalem for Christendom; the 'crusader' army of Jerusalem cowering 88 years later on the parched battlefield of Hattin near the Sea of Galilee, on the brink of a crushing defeat at the hands of Islam's great hero, Saladin; and Baybars, merciless sultan of Egypt, barring the gates of the 'crusader' city of Antioch in 1268, before butchering thousands within.

Against this backdrop, one could easily conceive of this as an age of 'total war' between Islam and the west, an era of embittered conflict, fueled by ingrained hatred and cycles of reciprocal violence. This certainly is the vision of the crusades used to promote the notion of an inevitable clash of civilisations between Europe and the Muslim world. But does this conception of the crusading era hold true under scrutiny?

The prophet Muhammad's death in AD 632 was followed by a furious wave of Islamic expansion, as legions of highly mobile, mounted Arab tribesmen poured out of the Arabian peninsula and overran Palestine (including Jerusalem), Syria, Iraq, Iran and Egypt with mercurial speed. Over the next century, the breakneck pace of this expansion slowed somewhat, but inexorable gains continued, such that, in the mid-eighth century, the Muslim world stretched from the borders of China in the east, across north Africa to Spain and France in the west.

By the year 1000, Muslims were living in established communities on the borders of western Europe, most notably in Iberia (modern-day Spain and Portugal) and Sicily. Those wishing to find evidence of constructive, rather than singularly destructive, contact during Islam's medieval encounters with the Christian west usually turn to these two frontier zones. There they uncover abundant evidence of cross-cultural interchange, intellectual transmission and artistic fusion. By contrast, the story of the crusades often is assumed to be one-dimensional, being driven solely by Christian holy war and Islamic jihad. In fact, such a view grossly underestimates the complexity and colour of the war for the Holy Land that began

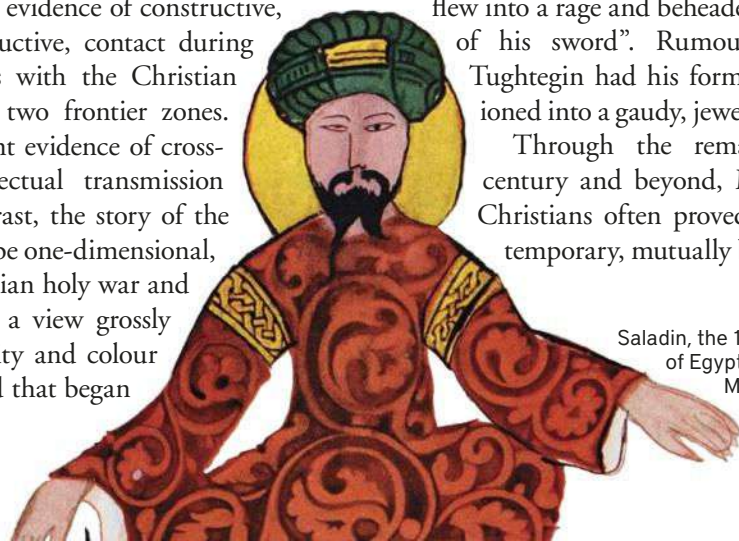
with the preaching of the First Crusade in 1095 and ended with the collapse of the crusader states in 1291.

In the wake of the First Crusade, four 'crusader states' were established in the Levant, the region on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. These isolated Latin (Catholic) Christian outposts endured for close to two centuries and came to be known as Outremer – the land beyond the sea. The fascinating history of these fragile settlements certainly reveals an ongoing struggle for survival against the Muslims of the eastern Mediterranean. But Outremer's story also throws up numerous examples of non-violent Latin-Muslim interaction. It wasn't simply a world of perpetual strife.

The crusader states were assimilated into the fractious patchwork of the region's politics with startling rapidity, with all sides showing a pragmatic willingness to deal, or even ally, with their supposed enemies when necessity demanded. Thus in 1108, less than a decade after the crusaders' brutal sack of Jerusalem, the Latins of Antioch fought alongside Muslim troops from the neighbouring city of Aleppo against a mutual enemy: in this instance, a second improbable coalition, made up of Christian forces from the rival crusader state of Edessa and Iraqis from the city of Mosul.

Some contacts were forged at an even more personal level. The Antiochene nobleman Robert fitz-Fulk the Leper, for one, established a close friendship with the Turkish warlord Tughtegin of Damascus in the early 12th century. This probably helped to cement a short-lived alliance between their two cities in 1115. But by 1119 the pair had become estranged. When Robert was taken prisoner that year and brought to Damascus, he might have hoped for clemency. In fact, when he refused to renounce his Christian faith, Tughtegin apparently flew into a rage and beheaded Robert "by a stroke of his sword". Rumour later had it that Tughtegin had his former friend's skull fashioned into a gaudy, jewel-encrusted goblet.

Through the remainder of the 12th century and beyond, Muslims and western Christians often proved willing to negotiate temporary, mutually beneficial truces. Even



Saladin, the 12th-century sultan of Egypt and Syria, led Muslim forces against the crusaders





**UNDER ATTACK** The 1097 siege of Antioch, a Muslim-held city located in what is present-day Turkey, was a crucial event of the First Crusade. The siege raged for more than seven months and is shown in this 14th-century illustration

Saladin, who seized power in Syria in 1174 on the promise of waging jihad and who repeatedly denounced other Muslims for dealing with the Latins, secretly agreed terms with the 'crusader' count of Tripoli in 1176. The sultan continued to demonstrate this same flexible approach to diplomatic contact for the remainder of his career.

Considerable care must be exercised when evaluating the significance of these instances of negotiation, truce and even alliance. By and large they do not represent attempts at forging a lasting peace between Islam and the west. Instead they were exercises in expediency. In the Middle Ages, diplomacy was usually a tool of conflict, employed to achieve advantage or, at most, a temporary pause in which to recover strength before renewing hostilities. Nonetheless, it is striking that, even in the context of a religiously charged struggle for dominion of the Holy Land, sustaining a 'total war' proved impossible – and perhaps even undesirable.

Through the first half of the 13th century, Saladin's successors (known to history as the Ayyubids) were even

more willing to find accommodations with the crusader states. Their aim seems to have been the maintenance of a delicate balance of power in the Levant so that commercial dealings between east and west could flourish. In fact, far from suffocating trade between avowed enemies, the age of the crusades witnessed an almost exponential growth in the scale and scope of commercial contact between Islam and Latin Europe.

**I**talian merchants from Venice, Pisa and Genoa played leading roles in this process, establishing enclaves in Outremer's great ports and coastal cities, and creating a complex network of trans-Mediterranean trade routes. These pulsing arteries of commerce, linking the near east with the west, enabled Levantine products (such as sugar cane and olive oil) and precious goods from the Middle East and Asia to reach the markets of Europe.

The passage of goods from the Muslim world to the Mediterranean ports of the Latin Levant was crucial not

GETTY IMAGES

## Muslims and Christians often proved willing to negotiate temporary, mutually beneficial truces



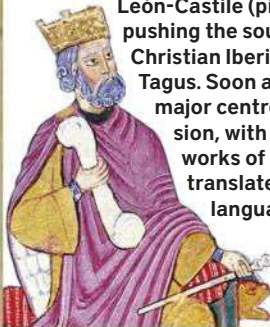


# HOLY WAR AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Key locations in the story of medieval east-west relations

## 1 Toledo

This former Visigothic capital was reconquered from Muslim forces by King Alfonso VI of León-Castile (pictured) in 1085, pushing the southern frontier of Christian Iberia south to the river Tagus. Soon after, Toledo became a major centre of cultural transmission, with many of the greatest works of ancient learning translated into western languages from Arabic, including Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle.



## 2 Clermont

On 27 November 1095, Pope Urban II delivered a historic speech proclaiming the First Crusade in a field outside Clermont. Some 100,000 people from across the west answered his call to avenge atrocities supposedly committed by Muslims in the east. They set out to recover the holy city of Jerusalem for Christendom, ushering in the age of the crusades.



## 3 Valencia

This Spanish port was ruled as an independent principality at the end of the 11th century by Rodrigo Díaz (pictured below), also known as El Cid. Far from being champion of the Iberian reconquista movement, Díaz actually made his fortune as a mercenary commander, serving both Christian and Muslim patrons.



## 4 Sicily

After more than a century of Arab rule, the island was invaded by the Normans in 1061. By 1130, a new Christian kingdom of Sicily had been proclaimed, a realm whose populace included many Muslims, and whose laws and customs were influenced by Islamic practice.

## 7 Alexandria

Through much of the Middle Ages, this ancient Egyptian port served as the vital hub of trade between east and west, and was only eclipsed by Acre in the 13th century. The Pisans were granted a protected commercial enclave in Alexandria in 1173 by Saladin, Islam's supposed jihadi 'champion', because he hoped to promote profitable trade and to secure ready supplies of shipbuilding timber.



## 5 Antioch

This great Syrian metropolis, once the third city of the Roman empire, was conquered during the First Crusade in 1098. It was here, in the 1120s, that the scholar Stephen of Pisa translated al-Majusi's *Royal Book*. This seminal Arabic medical treatise offered advice on an extraordinary array of conditions, some of it practical even by modern standards – although its suggestion that an infestation of lice be resolved by rubbing the body down with a mercury poultice should probably be ignored.

## 6 Acre

After a vicious siege that saw Acre bombarded by colossal boulders, the great bastion of Outremer fell to the Mamluks of Egypt on 18 May 1291. Within months, the few remaining vestiges of the mainland crusader states collapsed and the war for the Holy Land ended in Muslim triumph.

only to the Christians. It also became one of the linchpins of the wider near-eastern economy: vital both for the livelihoods of Muslim merchants plying the caravan routes to the east and to the incomes of Islam's great cities, Aleppo and Damascus. These shared interests produced interdependency and promoted carefully regulated contact, even at times of heightened political and military conflict. In the end – even in the midst of holy war – trade was too important to be disrupted.

The Iberian Muslim traveller Ibn Jubayr bore startling witness to this phenomenon. During a grand journey in the early 1180s that took in north Africa, Arabia, Iraq and Syria, Ibn Jubayr passed through the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem with a caravan of Muslim merchants from Damascus, visiting Acre and Tyre before taking a ship to Sicily. He described the highly structured systems that ensured the free flow of commercial traffic: strictly enforced rules of safe conduct; efficient customs-houses, including one at Acre employing Arabic-speaking clerks as record-keepers; and two-storey warehouses in Acre for the lodging of merchandise. Business between the Christians and Muslims was apparently carried out “with civility and respect and without harshness and unfairness”.

By the 13th century, with Ayyubid encouragement, Acre had become the Mediterranean's most important trade centre – the warehouse of the Levant, to which goods drawn from across Outremer, the near east and beyond were brought before being shipped to the west. Traffic also began heading from west to east. It became increasingly common for Latin merchants to travel into Muslim territory, trading woollen goods (especially those from Flanders) and saffron (the only western spice to find a market in the Orient) to the likes of Damascus, before returning to Acre with a new cargo of silks and precious and semi-precious stones.

Not everyone was impressed by the frenetic pace of life in the teeming port. One Latin bishop likened it to “a second Babylon”, condemning Acre as a “horrible city... full of countless disgraceful acts and evil deeds”, crammed with a population that was “utterly devoted to the pleasures of flesh” (prostitution was supposedly so rife that even clerics rented their rooms out to whores). The damning tone of these comments was at least in part a response to Acre's status as a cultural ‘melting pot’, a meeting place between Islam and the west, in which Latins might be exposed to Levantine ways and customs.

ALAMY / GETTY IMAGES / MAP ILLUSTRATION: MARTIN SANDERS, MAPART.CO.UK









The extent to which Outremer's Latin settlers embraced the lifestyles and practices of the eastern Mediterranean is still open to debate. One First Crusade veteran suggested that an element of adaptation was under way when he wrote, in the 1120s, that "God has transformed the Occident (west) into the Orient. For we who were occidentals have become orientals." However, reliable evidence of actual assimilation is relatively sparse.

Perhaps the most fascinating source of information in this regard is Usama ibn Munqidh's *Book of Contemplation*, a collection of edifying, illuminating and sometimes jocular, tales and anecdotes. Born in 1095 – the very year in which the crusades began – Usama was an Arab Syrian nobleman who enjoyed an extraordinarily long and varied career as a warrior, diplomat and counsellor. As such, he was uniquely well placed to witness the age of the crusades.

**O**n the question of orientalist Latins, Usama wrote: "There are some westerners who have become acclimatised and frequent the company of Muslims. These are better than those who have just arrived from their homelands, but they are the exception, and cannot be taken as typical." He then related the story of an old Latin knight, retired in Antioch, who had taken to eating only Levantine cuisine, employed "Egyptian cooking-women" and happily entertained Muslim guests. This attitude to near-eastern food is corroborated by the widespread popularity among the Latins of various local delicacies – citrus fruits, rice, chickpeas and lentils.

Elsewhere, Usama described how he visited a *hammam* (bath-house) in Tyre open to Latins and Muslims alike and also had heard of another Muslim-run *hammam* in Marrat. This latter bath-house was operated by a certain Salim, who told Usama a tale about a boorish Frankish knight who visited his establishment. The



#### ALLIANCE OF NATIONS

Crusaders were recruited from various countries, such as this Tuscan knight from Italy, as painted by the 14th-century artist Pacino di Buonaguida

knight decided, like Salim, to have all his pubic hair shaved off and supposedly was so pleased with the result that he had his wife brought in: "She lay down on her back and the knight said, 'Do her like you did me!' So I shaved her hair there as her husband stood watching me. He then thanked me and paid me my due for the service." Usama reflected upon the "great contradiction" revealed by this anecdote; that the westerners "have no sense of propriety or honor, yet they have immense courage".

Usama's interest was almost always in the bizarre and unusual, so his material has to be used with care. Nonetheless, his work offers tantalizing glimpses of daily life in Outremer and suggests that 'crusader' settlers did not live in a hermetically sealed culture, but engaged in a degree of adaptation and assimilation.

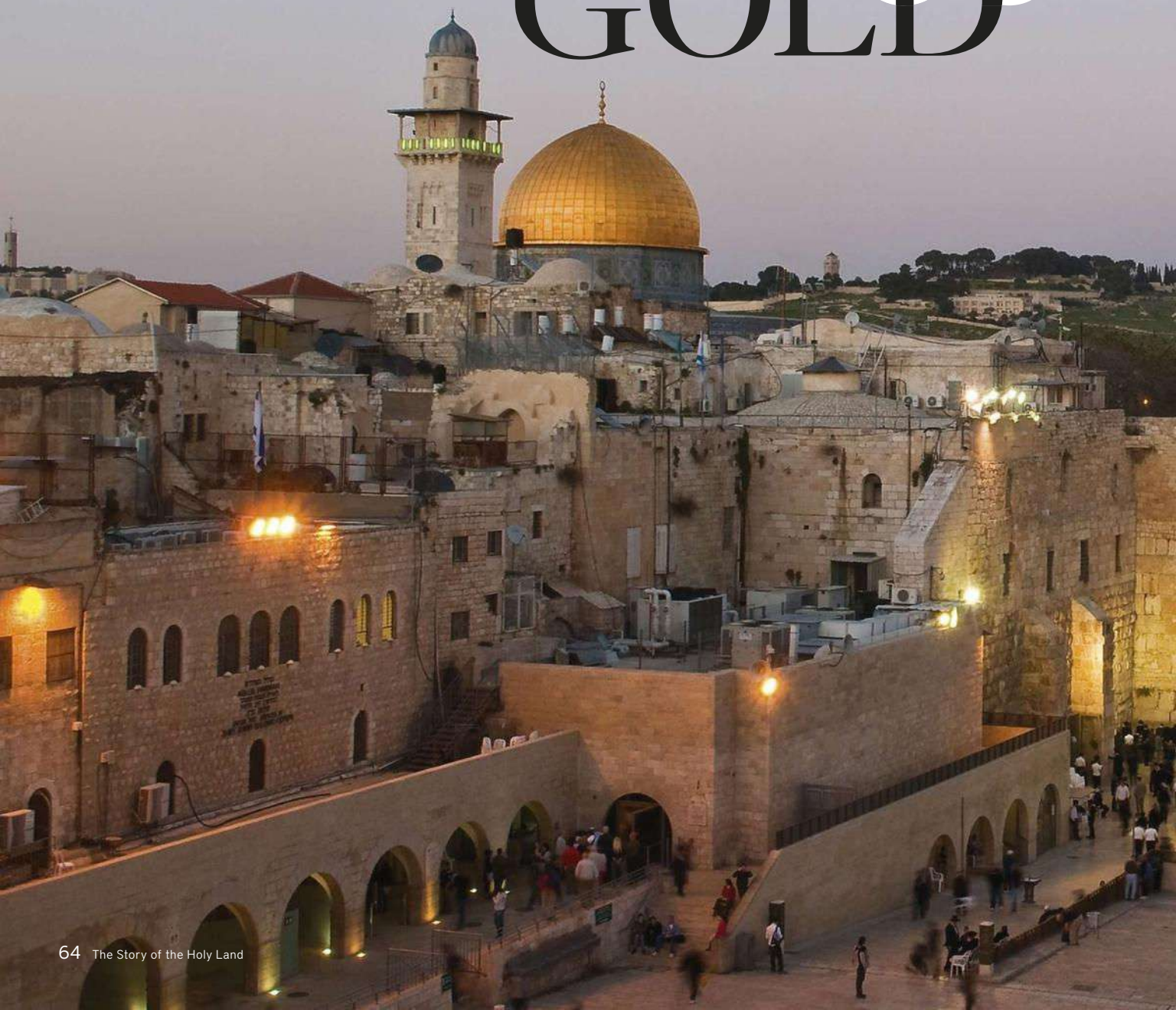
In the course of the war for the Holy Land, pragmatic reality and political, military and commercial expediency meant that 'crusader' settlers were brought into frequent contact with the native peoples of the Levant, including Muslims. As such, the crusades created one of the frontier environments in which Europeans were able to interact with and absorb 'eastern' culture.

Even shaded as they were by a religious struggle for sacred territory, the crusades were not waged as 'total wars', and resulted in encounters between Christians and Muslims not dissimilar to those witnessed in Sicily and Iberia. This was no cosy era of harmonious concord but, given the prevailing realities of the wider world, this should be no surprise. The medieval west itself was wracked by inter-Christian rivalry and interminable martial strife; endemic social and religious intolerance were also on the rise. By these standards, the uneasy mixture of contact and simmering conflict visible in the 'crusader' Levant was not that remarkable. On balance, the history of the crusades does not suggest that Islam and the west were predestined by some elemental rancour for a 'clash of civilisations'. ■

## In the eastern Mediterranean, 'crusader' settlers did not live in a hermetically sealed culture



# JERUS BLOOD & GOLD





# ALEM

A holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims, Jerusalem has a fractured past and an uncertain future. Historian **SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE** tells Rob Attar about why it has been beset by violence for thousands of years

DREAMSTIME

## CAPITAL GAINS

"When the Bible became the universal text, Jerusalem became the universal city."

So says Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of *Jerusalem: The Biography*





## “The view of Jerusalem is the history of the world”

Benjamin Disraeli summed it up when he wrote: “The view of Jerusalem is the history of the world.” A city with dozens of names and innumerable suitors, Jerusalem has been possessed or coveted by virtually all the great empires of Europe and the Middle East. It has been hotly contested by the three major monotheistic religions for over a millennium and its status continues to be a major obstacle to an Israeli/Palestinian peace agreement.

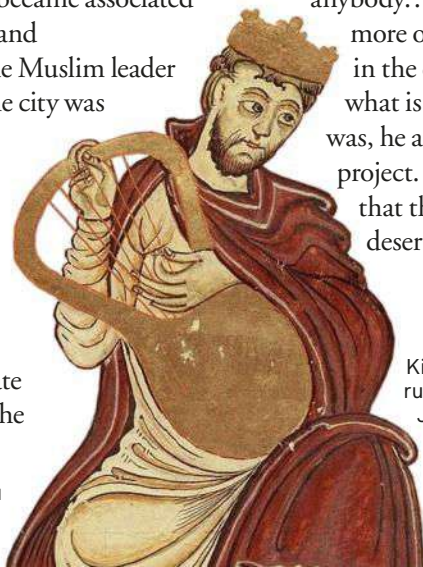
According to the Bible, King David chose the site of Jerusalem as the capital of his Jewish kingdom. This was around 1000 BC. Over the following centuries it was regularly invaded, notably in 586 BC by the Babylonians who took much of the Jewish population into captivity, only for them to be allowed to return in 538 by the Persians who had conquered Babylon. The Jews then had to contend with both Greek and Roman power. It was the latter who initiated the lengthy Jewish exile, sacking the city in AD 70.

The death of Jesus in Jerusalem in the early first century ensured the city became a place of veneration for the growing Christian faith. By the seventh century it became associated with Islam as well and was captured by the Muslim leader Omar I in 638. The city was held by a series of Islamic dynasties until the picture was further complicated by crusader attempts to secure the city, beginning in the late 11th century. For the

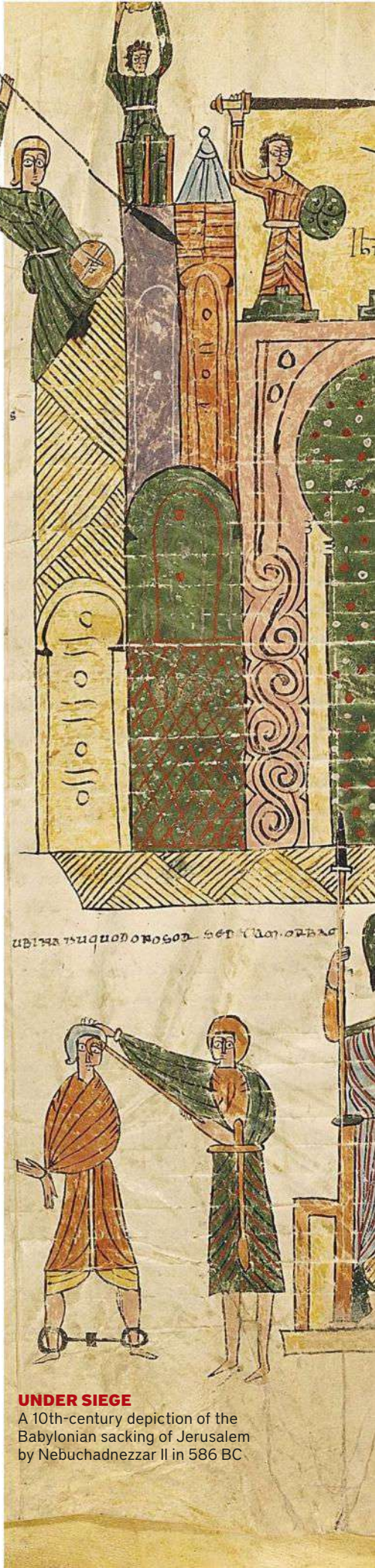
next 150 years, Jerusalem switched between Christian and Muslim control. From the mid-13th century, it was dominated by the Islamic Mamluks who were themselves overcome by the Ottoman Turks, also Muslims, in 1517.

The British captured Jerusalem in the First World War and, through the Balfour Declaration (a letter issued by foreign secretary Arthur Balfour), supported the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Thirty years later the UN partitioned the country. Jerusalem too was divided in the aftermath of Israel's victory in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Then during the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel seized the remainder of the city and continues to administer it to this day.

Historian Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of *Jerusalem: The Biography*, has strong family connections to the city, especially through his ancestor Moses Montefiore, who established several Jewish institutions there during the 19th century. Negotiating the various religious angles when putting together a book like his was no easy task. Montefiore accepts that “it won't please anybody, it shouldn't please anybody... everyone wants more of their view in it but in the end I have to decide what is correct”. It was, he admits, a daunting project. Nevertheless he feels that this is a story that deserves to be told.



King David, the Jewish ruler who made Jerusalem his capital



### UNDER SIEGE

A 10th-century depiction of the Babylonian sacking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BC





### Why did Jerusalem become such a holy city in the first place?

Jerusalem became holy because everyone else thought it was holy. There's a great tradition in holiness and, again and again in Jerusalem, we see somebody commandeering their predecessors' stories and holiness. The reason why holiness is piled on holiness, passion on passion, imperial desire on imperial desire is that other people have wanted it. There's a great competitiveness, which you see in different sites in the city. For example, the Muslims wanted the Temple Mount because the Jews had made it holy; the Jews had chosen it probably because the Canaanites regarded it as holy.

### So there wasn't anything intrinsic about the location of Jerusalem. Could it have been anywhere?

Yes, it could have been anywhere but once it began, it couldn't have been anywhere else. In the ancient world, springs and high places were regarded as naturally holy and Jerusalem had both of those. There are many hints in the Bible that suggest that it was a holy place before David chose it. After that, it obviously became the holy place for the Jews.

But what really made the difference was the Bible. That collection of books is really a biography of Jerusalem, so when the Bible became the universal text, Jerusalem became the universal city.

### Why has Jerusalem had this enduring appeal?

Again, I think it's because of the Bible. That's the short answer. Also, once it was regarded as the holiest city, it gained a strange status as somewhere that everyone felt belonged to him or her. That's why everyone who went there was dissatisfied with Jerusalem and wanted to remake it. There's even a special sort of madness for people who are disappointed with the city called Jerusalem Syndrome.

### One recurring theme in your book is the tremendous amount of blood that has been shed in Jerusalem.

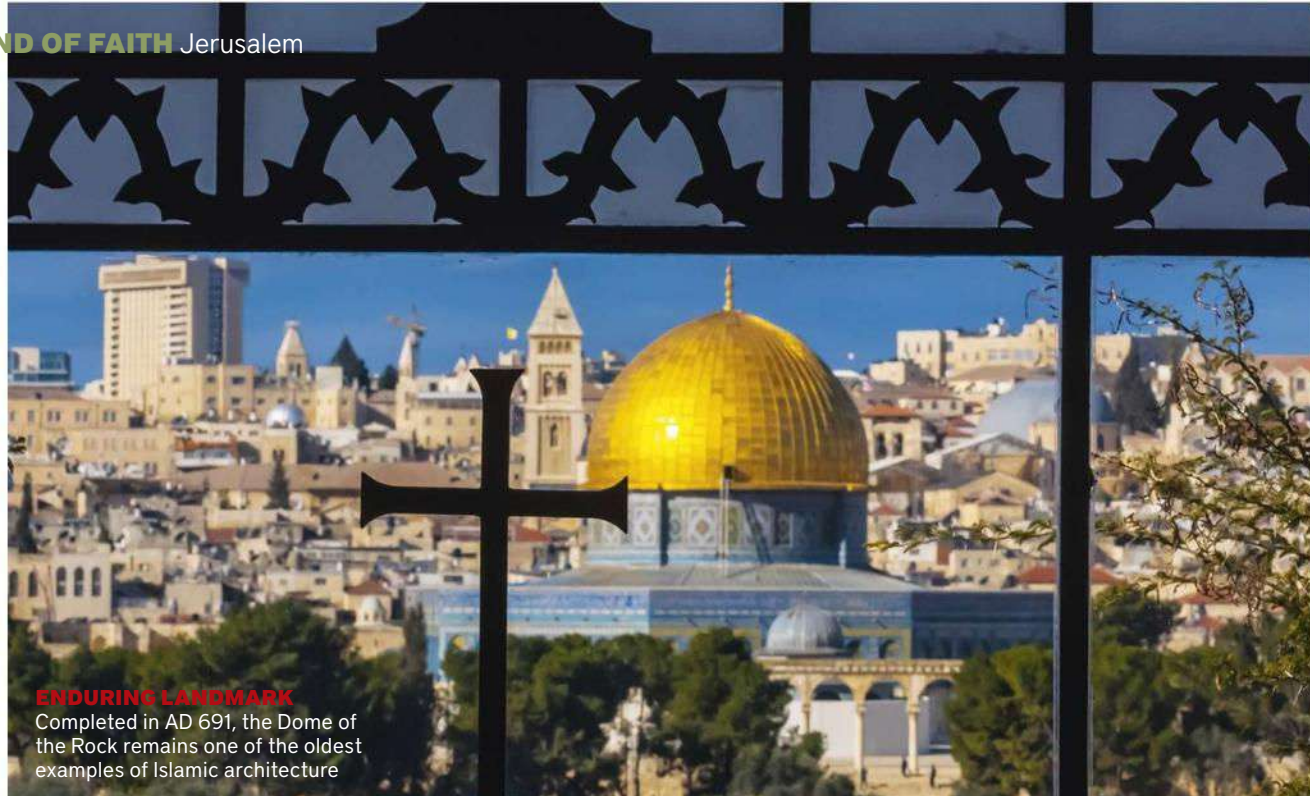
There's been more slaughter, more death and more hate in Jerusalem than in any other city the world has ever known. I think the city has been stormed and fought over around 40 times. Of course, the 20th century was brutal, but it was actually nothing like as brutal as in previous times. The destructions of the city in 586 BC [by the Babylonians] and AD 70 [by the Romans] must have been terrifying. Virtually everybody was killed.

The siege and fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was worse than the Warsaw uprising or the battle of Stalingrad. It was a running massacre for months on end, coupled with starvation and every sort of insanity that you could imagine. The suffering really does read like a modern catastrophe, like

“There's been more slaughter, more death and more hate in Jerusalem than in any other city the world has ever known







**ENDURING LANDMARK**

Completed in AD 691, the Dome of the Rock remains one of the oldest examples of Islamic architecture

something from the Second World War. It was so terrible.

**Can we attribute this violence to the holiness of the city?**

Yes, that's right. The expectation of Jerusalem and belief in Jerusalem is so passionate that people will die for it. In fact, it is a city of the dead in many ways, filled with cemeteries. The dead seem to live there and have an enormous influence in every way in the city. Jerusalem is magical but it is also the most poisonous place on Earth – everywhere you look, somebody has been murdered or something has been destroyed.

**The crusades have a reputation of being a terrible act of Christian violence. But, in Jerusalem's long history of bloodshed, were they really that exceptional?**

There's an endless myth that the Muslims were always the civilised ones and the crusaders were medieval

brutes riding out of the darkness of the Dark Ages with no culture at all. Book after book is published repeating the same material about the House of Wisdom, the Abbasid academy founded in Baghdad. But of course when the crusaders came it was more than 200 years after that and the Muslim world was very much like the Christian one, with great culture but also complete chaos.

The Muslims were ruled by brutish warlords, so actually I regard them as pretty interchangeable. Sources show that the Muslims and Christians were as cultured and brutish as each other.

**In more recent times, many Christians in the west have encouraged a Jewish return to Jerusalem. Why have they done this when the city is holy for their faith as well?**

From the 17th century, there was a return to a literal interpretation of the

Bible in Britain. Even fairly secular people, such as prime ministers David Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour, were brought up with a love for the Bible, which was basically the Jewish story. So they believed that the Jews should come back to Jerusalem. One of the most bizarre things I realised is that, although the 19th-century British empire is regarded as this wonderful, rational force for civilisation, many of its leading players held this evangelical view of the second coming and the Jewish return.

**Have all three faiths ever lived together harmoniously in Jerusalem?**

Not really. The late Ottoman period was a relatively good time, but that was only really because the Jews were being protected by Britain. Before then Jews were tolerated but it was a pretty mean-spirited form of tolerance. They were scarcely allowed access to their own holy place, the Wailing Wall, only having 10 feet in front of it to pray in.

In 1229 there was a short-lived peace deal when Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II agreed to share the city with the Muslims. He

“ Jerusalem has been important in the most continuous way for the longest time. It's so ancient and yet so current



divided it so that the Muslims had the Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount, and the Christians had the rest of the town. The Jews were banned on pain of death, however, so it wasn't great from their point of view.

There were also negotiations in 1192 between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart about sharing the city, which again have modern parallels. When you read these exchanges, they are reminiscent of [Palestinian leader] Yasser Arafat talking to [Israeli prime minister] Ehud Barak in 2000.

### Does the history of Jerusalem give any grounds for optimism for its future?

Yes it does. Anyone who says that they know what is going to happen is obviously insane, but there are great possibilities. It could be shared. After all, it is only a city. What is important is mutual respect and mutual recognition of each other's histories.

At the moment there are lots of websites by rightwing Jewish organizations almost denying the Palestinian narrative. There are equally many bloggers and political orders coming out of the Palestinian movement that completely deny any sort of Jewish connection to the city. It is a travesty. Until those sorts of things are recognised, no peace deal will ever stick, no matter how many times it is signed or negotiated.

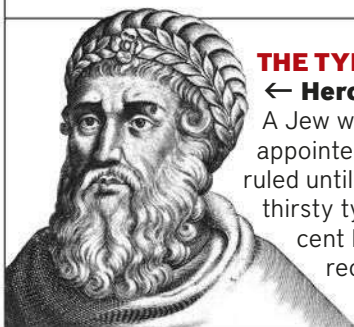
### Is Jerusalem the most important city in world history?

Well you're asking someone who is inevitably going to say yes! Of course it's not the oldest city – far from it. But it has been important in the most continuous way for the longest time.

It's a city that's so ancient and yet also so current. Jerusalem is changing all the time. ■

## 5 people who shaped a city

... from biblical times until today



### THE TYRANT KING

← **Herod the Great** (73–4 BC)

A Jew with strong Roman connections, Herod was appointed king of Judea by the Senate in 37 BC and ruled until his death. History records him as a blood-thirsty tyrant, but he was responsible for magnificent building work in Jerusalem, including the reconstruction of the Second Jewish Temple.

### THE DOME BUILDER

**Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan** (c646–705) →

Abd al-Malik was an important leader of the Muslim Umayyad dynasty, which governed Jerusalem from the mid-seventh until the mid-eighth centuries. From 685–91 he oversaw the construction of the Dome of the Rock, a spectacular shrine on the site where Muhammad is said to have risen to heaven.

The dome solidified Islam's presence in the city.



### THE CRUSADING POPE

← **Pope Urban II** (c1035–99)

In 1095, Urban addressed a gathering of European notables and called for the capture of Jerusalem by a Christian army. He thus initiated the First Crusade, which succeeded in taking the holy city four years later. Several crusades followed in the 12th and 13th centuries as Christian Europe sought to retain its fragile hold on Jerusalem.

### THE SPLENDID RULER

**Suleiman the Magnificent** (c1494–1566) →

Sultan Suleiman I ruled the expanding Ottoman empire for nearly half a century. In that time he greatly renovated Jerusalem, which had been captured by his father in 1517. The city's population increased significantly during his reign and among the new arrivals were Jews fleeing persecution in Europe.



### THE HOPEFUL SOLDIER

← **Moshe Dayan** (1915–81)

A hardened warrior who wore a distinctive eyepatch, Dayan was the Israeli defence minister who ordered the invasion of Jerusalem's Old City during the 1967 Six-Day War. When reuniting Jerusalem under Israeli control, Dayan said he hoped that the city could be a place where Jews and Arabs would live in harmony.



# The Rise

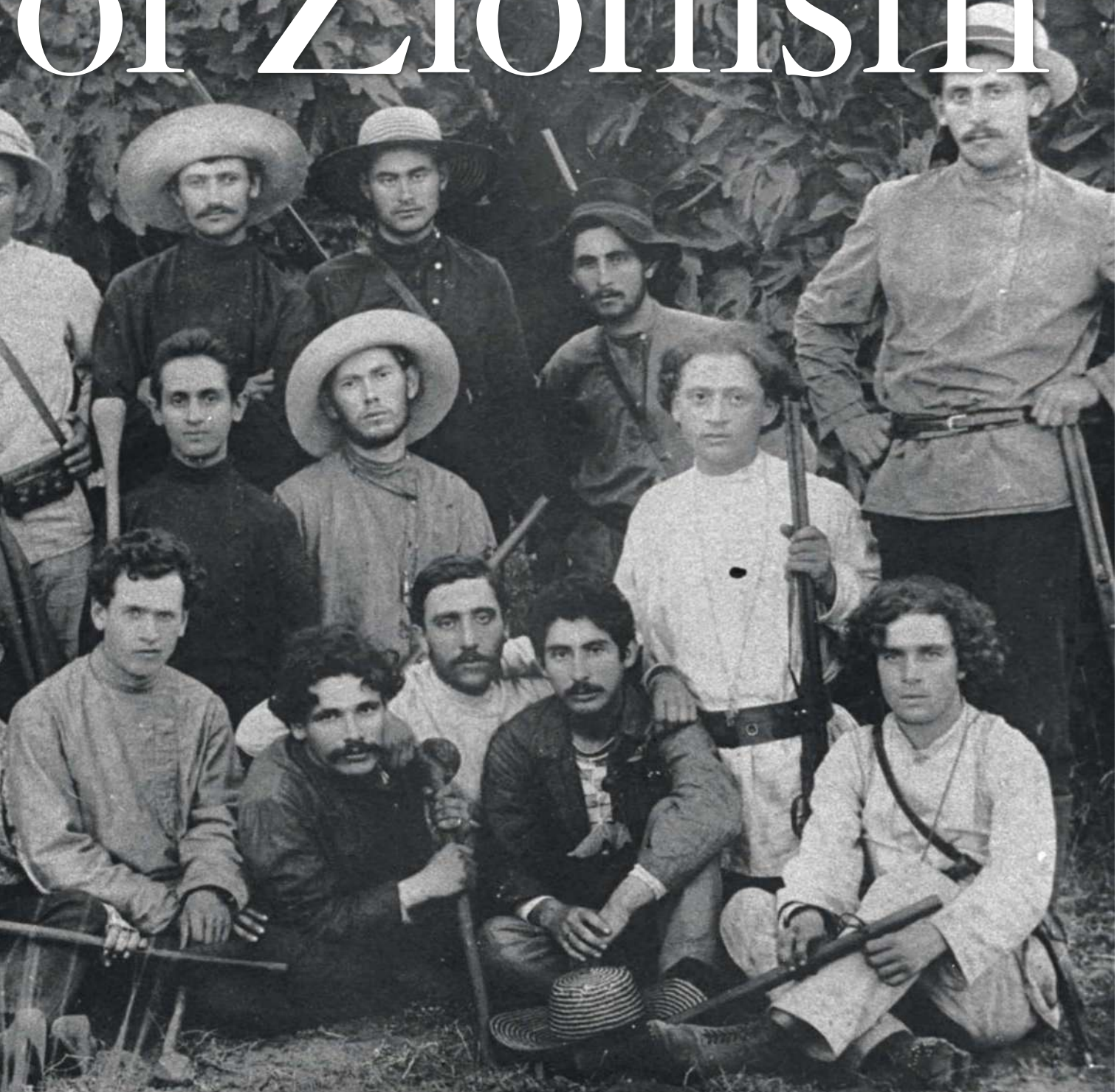
## SECURITY FORCE

Pictured in 1900, these armed men and boys are members of Hashomer, a Jewish organization dedicated to protecting the earliest Zionist settlements in Ottoman-ruled Palestine

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# of Zionism



Zionism called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. **SARA Yael HIRSCHHORN** traces the movement's evolution and development →



In 1906, in the first meeting between the British parliamentarian Lord Balfour and the University of Manchester chemist and future Israeli president Chaim Weizmann, Balfour asked why the Zionist movement was adamant about settlement in Palestine instead of an alternative plan to establish Zion in Uganda, the ‘practical approach’ advocated by the British government.

“Suppose I were to offer you Paris instead of London,” the professor countered, “would you take it?” “But, Dr Weizmann, we have London,” Balfour responded matter-of-factly. “That is true,” Weizmann averred, “but we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh.”

“Are there many Jews who think like you?” mused Balfour. The Zionist leader declared: “I believe I speak the minds of millions of Jews who you will never see and cannot speak for themselves.” “If that is so,” Balfour conceded, “you will one day be a force.”

“It is curious,” he continued, “the Jews I meet are quite different.” “Mr Balfour,” sighed Weizmann, “you meet the wrong kind of Jews.”

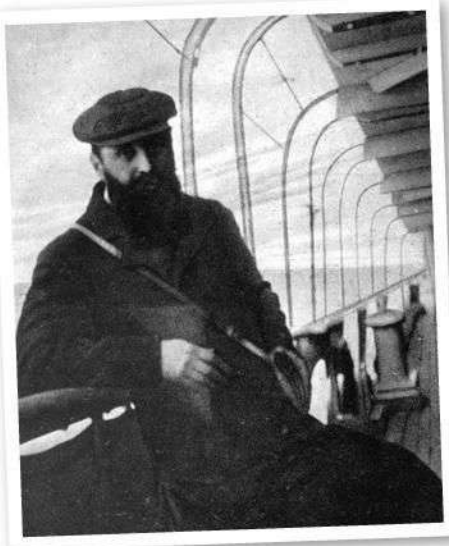
This extraordinary early 20th-century exchange between two Zionists illuminates many of the contested ideas about territory, ideology and communal support that characterised the developing Zionist project. While Balfour later emerged as the political patron of 1917’s Balfour Declaration – the letter that called for the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”, a plan Weizmann would work to bring into fruition right through until his death – tensions between theory and praxis did not end with the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. In fact, Zionism is not a monolithic ideology and has spurred many alternative visions of a Jewish state until today. In its short intellectual history, Jewish nationalism has revolutionised global politics.

The terms ‘Zionism’ and ‘Zionist’ were coined in 1890 by the Viennese Jewish activist Nathan Birnbaum to provide a vocabulary for a larger political programme calling for Jewish emancipation and national revival. While diasporic Jewry had incorporated a mythological longing

for a return to the Holy Land in prayer and ritual since their exile in AD 70, the modern political expression of these aspirations was first advanced by so-called ‘proto-Zionists’, like German-Jewish philosopher Moses Hess and Russian-Jewish doctor Leo Pinsker, in the moment of national uprisings of the mid-19th century. While Birnbaum himself later abandoned the fledgling Zionist movement to serve as a spokesperson for Jewish cultural autonomy on the continent (ironically, he was forced to flee to the Netherlands to escape Nazi persecution), he was succeeded by other thinkers in western Europe who devoted their careers to the cause of Jewish self-determination, including Theodore Herzl, a fellow Viennese writer.

As an ‘un-Jewish Jew’ ill-acquainted with religious tradition or communal dynamics, Theodore Herzl was an unusual choice to be the father of the political Zionist movement. However, the journalist had become radicalised when covering the wrongful conviction and imprisonment of the French Jewish military officer Alfred Dreyfus on charges of treason in 1894, a case motivated by anti-Semitic prejudice. In the Dreyfus Affair, Herzl saw a perfect example of the so-called Jewish question, of the failed assimilation of western European Jewry into continental society.

As he articulated in his famous tract *Der Judenstaat* [The Jewish State] in 1896, Herzl saw the practical solution to this problem as Jewish self-determination in a national homeland. Herzl had many odd rhapsodies about a future Jewish state, as chronicled in his eclectic diaries, although he insisted upon a capitalist model and a strictly secular state where “we shall keep our priests in the confines of their temples in the same way that we shall keep our professional army within the confines of their barracks”. Both ideas stand in stark contrast to the socialist origins of the early Zionist pioneers in Palestine and the religious overtones of the State of Israel today.



#### FOUNDING FATHER

The architect of Zionism, the ‘un-Jewish Jew’ Theodore Herzl, aboard a ship approaching the coast of Palestine in 1898

AKG IMAGES





#### PROMISED LAND?

Jewish immigrants from Europe arrive at the port of Haifa in 1929. Around 100,000 of their compatriots would migrate to Palestine in the following decade

Imbued with nationalist fervour, Herzl launched a tireless diplomatic campaign to bring this state into being in the 1890s, criss-crossing Europe to meet with international leaders, including Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm, who he thought might make an ideal patron of the Zionist project. He also organised a series of Zionist congresses where activists and supporters met in posh galas – with a dress code of tuxedos and tails – to discuss the project. (Mean-while, most of European Jewry was entirely uninterested in his fantastical ideas, which ultra-Orthodox Jews in particular railed against as a blasphemous perversion of a heavenly will to wait for the divine redemption.)

One major issue of debate was the physical location of the future Jewish state. Early Zionist leaders considered not only the Holy Land, but also Uganda and Argentina. Ultimately, Herzl was swayed by Palestine due to historical and religious ties, although was rather unimpressed by a dirty and poor Jerusalem he encountered on his only trip to the region in 1898. He also did not foresee any future conflict between Jews and Arabs, writing in his 1902 semi-

autobiographical novel *Altneuland* (Old-New Land) of a local population eagerly accepting western methods brought by Jewish immigrants. Herzl died in 1904 before seeing much of his vision realised. The mantle of political Zionist succession passed to Weizmann and others.

The American Zionist scholar Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg once likened Herzl to Mirabeau, the instigator of the French Revolution, before extending the analogy to view Ahad Ha'am as the sceptic Edmund Burke. Ahad Ha'am (the pen-name of activist Asher Zvi Ginsburg, literally meaning 'one of the people') hailed from the cosmopolitan Jewish community of Odessa, an oasis within the oppressive regime of the Russian tsar. While once famously asserting to the nay-sayers that "I am a (true) Zionist", he was sceptical of Herzl's lofty aims, seeing the Jewish question not as a problem of the Jews, but one of Judaism itself.

## Early Zionist leaders considered Uganda and Argentina as the location of the future Jewish state

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**SCHOOL OF LEARNING** Esther Shapira (left) moved to the pioneering Jewish colony of Rishon Le-Zion in Palestine in the 1890s where she founded the community's first Hebrew kindergarten

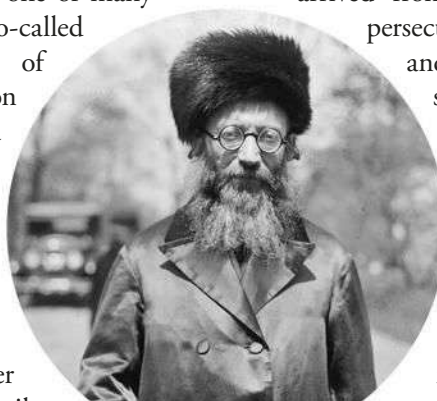
Its corresponding solution, then, was a homeland for a Jewish spiritual renaissance in Palestine, rather than a refuge from the scourge of anti-Semitism for its beleaguered bodies. As a cultural Zionist, Ahad Ha'am was under no illusion that he could save all of Europe Jewry, nor unaware of how an influx of Jews into Palestine might affect the local population. Writing in his famous tract *Emet M'Eretz Yisrael* (Truth from the Land of Israel), he recognised pre-existing Arab settlement and wrote of the "impulse to despotism" on the part of Jewish pioneers. Yet his pleas for a spiritual reckoning fell on deaf ears as dark clouds amassed over Europe.

The Jewish question inspired only one of many branches of Zionism at the time. The so-called Arab question was another axis of consideration, with varying opinions on living together in a binational state (a view represented by the humanist Zionist Martin Buber) or living apart separated by a metaphorical iron wall (the revisionist Zionism of Vladimir Jabotinsky). Another fault-line was religion, which included the radical secular responses of socialists like Ber Borchoy, or those who sought to reconcile religion and nationalism, like Abraham Yitzhak Ha-Cohen Kook, the first chief rabbi of Palestine from 1921–35. Further, there was both support for, and opposition

to, Jewish nationalism in the diaspora. Zionism remained a minority movement in Europe – it's likely that less than 10,000 were card-carrying Zionists – yet there were perhaps as many 'Zionisms' as 'Zionists'.

Early Jewish settlers in Ottoman Palestine and, later, the British Mandate were inspired by all of these ideologies – or, sometimes, by no ideology at all. The initial wave of 35,000 pioneers of the first *aliyah* (meaning 'ascendancy') mostly arrived from eastern Europe fleeing a wave of persecution, beginning in 1882. They tried, and mostly failed, as agriculturalists, but succeeded in establishing the first Zionist settlements in the Galilee. Given their small numbers, there was relatively little friction with the local Arab population, although they often emulated Middle Eastern customs of food and dress.

However, the next group of 40,000 immigrants prior to the First World War was more ideological in its make-up. Many future leaders of the State of Israel, like David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, were part of this contingent. They explicitly expressed socialist Zionist principles and



#### THE PIONEER

Abraham Kook was the first chief rabbi of Palestine. Unlike others, his brand of Zionism favoured the merging of religion and nationalism





**LEFT FIELD** A farmer works the lands of a mid-1930s kibbutz, the collective communities based on Zionist socialist principles



**COMMUNITY ACTION** By building a tower and stockade, Zionist Jewish volunteers collectively establish Kibbutz Ein Gev in 1937

helped implement the framework for statehood, including the establishment of the political body of the Zionist Organisation; the land-purchasing organ of the Jewish National Fund; and the Haganah paramilitary.

The third and fourth *aliyot* in the tumultuous interwar years brought over 120,000 Jews from eastern and central Europe mainly to Palestine's cities, including the new urban hub of Tel Aviv. Some came as idealists, but many had been denied their preferred immigration option to the 'goldinah medinah' – the golden land – of the United States. Pressures from this swell of immigration led to the first serious clashes between Jews and Arabs in 1929.

When more than 100,000 Jews arrived in the next decade, fleeing the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, violence spiralled into the Arab revolt of 1936–39. While the British mandatory government tried to halt immigration and land sales during the Second World War, they were largely unsuccessful in deterring population growth and inter-communal violence. The Jewish community in Palestine before the Israeli state – known as the *Yishuv* – was also divided between those who supported negotiation with the British and Arabs (led by Ben-Gurion) and those

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who encouraged the violent tactics of the Irgun underground (led by future prime minister Menachem Begin), the movement later responsible for the King David Hotel bombing of British troops.

The State of Israel was declared on 14 May 1948, with the Jewish population in Palestine numbering more than 600,000. By then, battles had already broken out. Today, the 1948 war is also known to Israel as its War of Independence and to Palestinians as the *Naqba* (the Catastrophe) and is much debated by scholars.

Recently, Israel/Palestine has been gripped by the 'post-Zionism debates' that aim to deconstruct nationalist ideology and mythology surrounding Jewish self-determination. With the State of Israel reaching its 70th anniversary in 2018, it continues to reflect on its brief history and struggles to achieve a more inclusive Zionist vision and peaceful future for all its citizens in the Holy Land today. ■

## There was relatively little friction between the first wave of immigrants and the local Arab population



# LAND O

A REGION SPLIT AND SCARRED BY CONFLICT

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✚ WWI and the battle for **PALESTINE**

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✚ The **BRITISH MANDATE**: a failed imperial adventure

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✚ **ARAB REVOLT**: the region reaches boiling point

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✚ The Arab-Israeli **SIX-DAY WAR**

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✚ **ENTEBBE CRISIS**: a new view

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# F WAR



## **BORDER WAR**

Syrian soldiers surrender to Israeli troops advancing on the Golan Heights during 1967's Six-Day War



# Clash of

**EUGENE ROGAN** reveals how the British and Ottomans





# Empires

vied for control of Palestine during the First World War



## THE GUNS OF WAR

An Ottoman light artillery unit in action in Palestine in 1917. Much of the Ottomans' military hardware was supplied by the Germans, including this 105mm light field howitzer





From the moment the Ottomans entered the First World War in November 1914, the people of Palestine had anticipated a British invasion. In March 1915, a group of Palestinian intellectuals met in Jerusalem. "Our conversation revolved around this miserable war and how long it is likely to continue, as well as the fate of this [Ottoman] state," Ihsan Turjman, a young Arab conscript in the Ottoman army lamented in his diary. "But what will be the fate of Palestine?" Turjman and his friends believed the fall of the Ottomans was imminent and fully expected the British to seize Palestine and annex it to their protectorate in Egypt.

The Palestinian intellectuals, like the British war planners, underestimated the tenacity of the Ottoman army during the war. Rather than being the first to fall, the Ottomans fought the full four years of the war and dealt the Allies major defeats in the Gallipoli peninsula (in modern-day Turkey) and Mesopotamia before the British even attempted to force the gates of Palestine. By the time they launched the Palestine campaign in the spring of 1917, the British had a healthy respect for their Ottoman adversary.

As a prelude to the Palestine campaign, the British had first to secure the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. Largely devoid of water or roads, the Sinai desert was nearly impassable to modern armies. Early in the war, the British had decided not to disperse their troops across vulnerable positions in the Sinai, but to concentrate their forces along the well-supplied Suez Canal zone instead. This left the Ottomans a free hand in the Sinai. By early 1916, Turkish forces had extended a railway track south from Beersheba into central Sinai and created a network of bases with deep wells to sustain a crack desert cavalry force.

Unwilling to allow the Ottomans to secure the Sinai and threaten the Suez Canal, the British launched a campaign to recover the peninsula. Between March and December 1916, they extended a railway and water pipeline from the northern Suez Canal zone towards the Palestine frontier of the Ottoman empire at al-Arish. The Ottomans did all to disrupt its progress. On 23 April, the Turkish Desert Force, led by the German colonel Friedrich Kress von Kressenstein, executed a surprise attack on the British railhead at Qatiya, securing the surrender of nearly an entire cavalry regiment before withdrawing with impunity.

Following the debacle at Qatiya, the British deployed troops from Australia and New Zealand. Many of the men in this Anzac Mounted Division were veterans of the Gallipoli campaign. In one engagement towards the end of the Sinai campaign, Australian troops were surprised to come face to face with Ottoman veterans of Gallipoli. "Put it there, old chap," an Australian private said to a Turkish soldier wearing a Gallipoli campaign medal that he had just taken prisoner. "I was there myself, and it was such a hell of a place that you have my sympathy."

By 9 January 1917, the British had completed the occupation of the Sinai up to the border town of Rafah. The railway reached Khan Yunis, just 15 miles from Gaza, and the water pipeline was close behind. The British began to concentrate troops until they achieved numerical superiority over the Ottoman defenders. By March, the British commander, General Archibald Murray, was ready to storm Gaza.

At dawn on 26 March 1917, Anzac cavalry set off to attack Gaza from the north while British infantry attempted a frontal assault on Turkish lines. By 6:30pm, after a day of intense fighting and heavy casualties, Ottoman forces were on the verge of surrender. Yet a breakdown in battlefield communications meant the British commanders had no idea how close to victory their own forces were. To the Turks' astonishment, the British ordered a general retreat, suffering heavy casualties while withdrawing. By the end of the battle, British losses exceeded those of the Ottomans. The Turks had claimed victory in the first battle of Gaza.

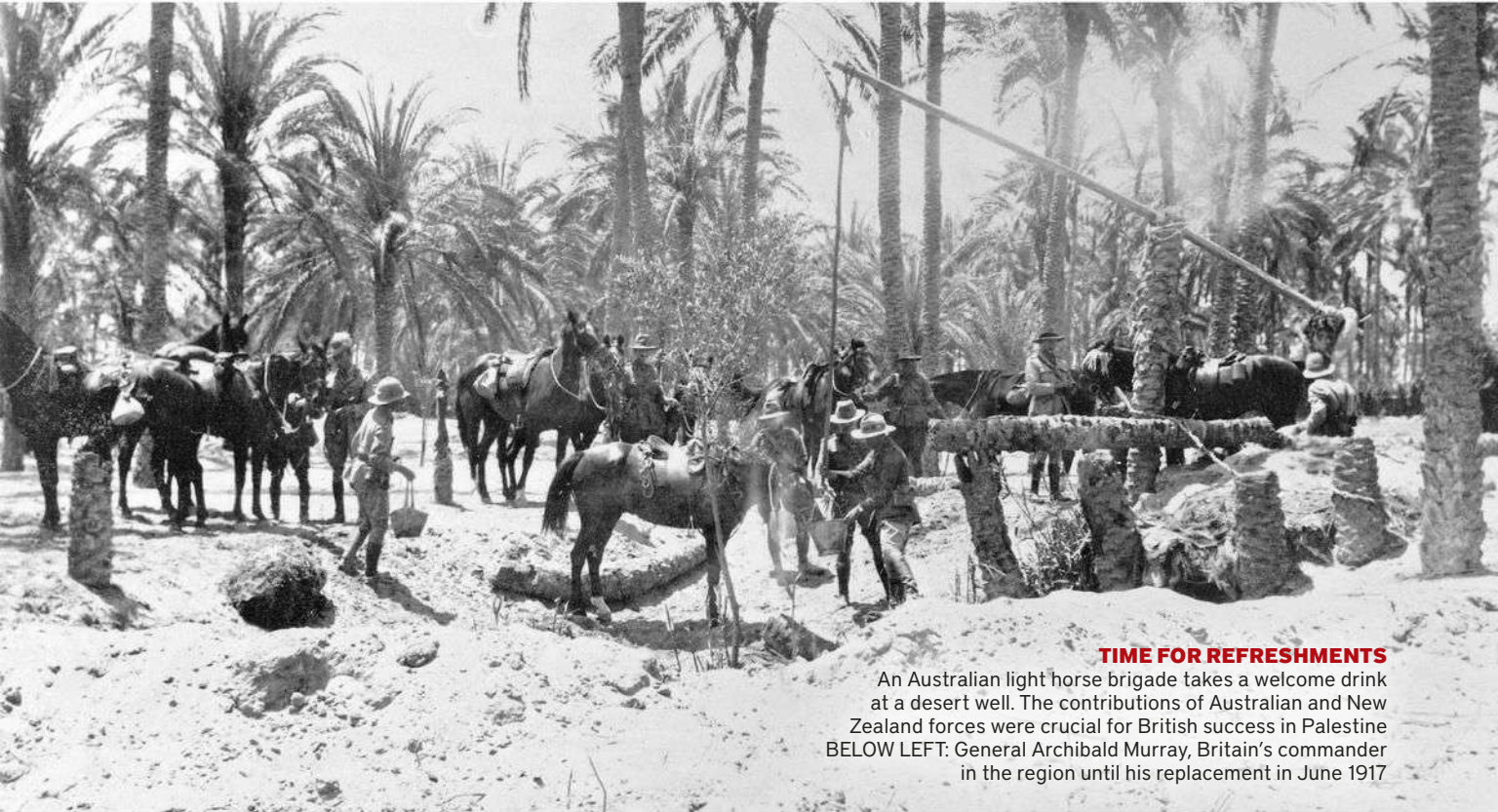
In his reports back to London, General Murray played down the bad news and exaggerated his gains in this first attempt on Gaza. The London newspapers, hungry for positive reports from any front of the war, reprinted verbatim Murray's claims of heavy Turkish casualties and an advance of 15 miles. The enthusiastic war cabinet instructed Murray to resume hostilities, defeat Turkish forces south of Jerusalem and capture the holy city as a boost to public morale in Britain.

Murray threw the very latest battlefield technology against the Ottomans in the second battle of Gaza. He secured 4,000 gas-filled artillery shells for the initial bombardment of Turkish lines, the first time gas had been used against the Ottomans (who were not issued with gas masks). Eight tanks were delivered in secret to assist the infantry in their advances on well-entrenched Turkish lines. On the eve of



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#### TIME FOR REFRESHMENTS

An Australian light horse brigade takes a welcome drink at a desert well. The contributions of Australian and New Zealand forces were crucial for British success in Palestine  
 BELOW LEFT: General Archibald Murray, Britain's commander in the region until his replacement in June 1917

battle, British and French warships subjected the town of Gaza to one of the heaviest bombardments yet witnessed on the Ottoman front. And, on 17 April, the British launched their infantry on Ottoman positions.

Over three days of battle, the Ottomans held their lines and drove the British into retreat with heavy losses. None of the British 'secret weapons' had daunted the Turks, who had not noticed the gas and managed to destroy at least three of the eight British tanks. When British generals took stock of their losses, they were forced to break off the engagement and accept a second defeat yet more terrible than the first. By nightfall on 19 April, the British had lost 6,444 casualties – more than triple the number of Turkish losses.

Murray's failures at Gaza cost him his job. He was replaced in June 1917 by General Sir Edmund Allenby, dispatched by the British prime minister David Lloyd George with the seemingly impossible assignment of conquering Jerusalem by Christmas. Allenby's task was made more difficult by changes in Turkish strategy. Enver Pasha,

the minister of war, established a new Ottoman formation structured on German lines. Called the Yıldırım Group, the formation merged two experienced armies under some of the empire's most respected generals, including Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the future first president of Turkey. With a budget of around £5m in bullion, the Yıldırım Group was deployed to the Palestine front at the end of September 1917. Building on existing defensive lines, the Turks made the Gaza front practically impregnable.

Allenby wanted to ensure overwhelming numerical superiority over enemy forces. The British infantry was double the size of Ottoman ground troops and eight times the size of the Turkish cavalry. Allenby also achieved a three-to-two advantage over Turkish artillery. Yet he did not want to squander this supremacy with the sort of frontal assault that had resulted in defeat in the two previous battles of Gaza. Operating in strict secrecy, Allenby unleashed a surprise attack on Ottoman positions to the east, in the railhead of Beersheba on 31 October.

From dawn until dusk, the Turkish defenders held the British back. Attacking from the drylands, the only way the British could sustain the fight was if they secured the wells of Beersheba to water their horses. Faced with the prospect of another defeat, the Desert Mounted Corps

## The British commanders had no idea how close to victory they were and ordered a retreat

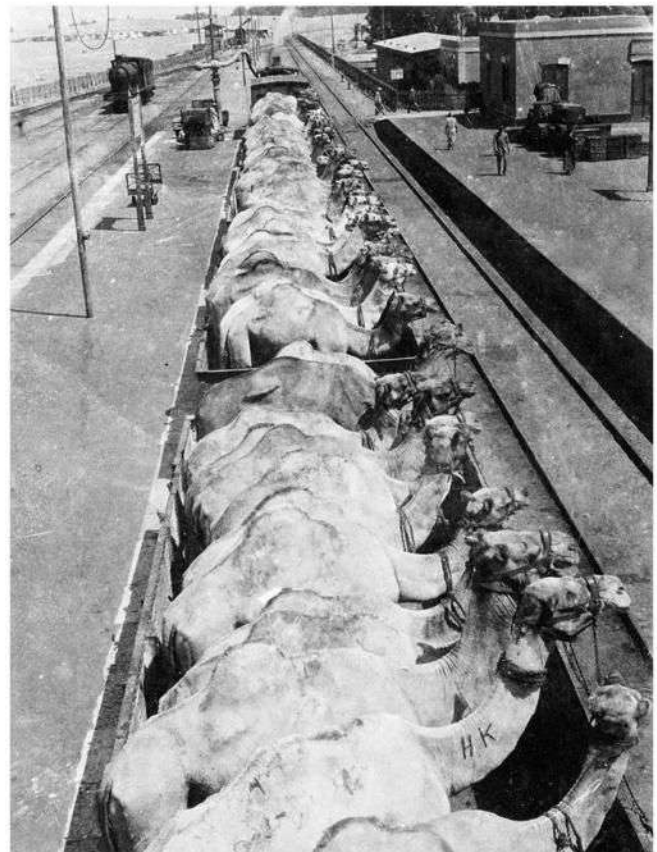




**MARK OF RESPECT** General Edmund Allenby, commander of Britain's Egyptian Expeditionary Force, leads his troops into Jerusalem on 11 December 1917. He did so on foot to show respect for the sacred city. "The population received me well," he later wrote



**JAWS OF DEFEAT** Members of the Turkish cavalry on the streets of Beersheba. The British capture of the city from the Ottomans in October 1917 was a vital victory in the Palestinian campaign



**ANIMAL TRACKS** Camels ready to be transported on the Sinai railway to Palestine. These animals were heading for service with a camel-mounted artillery unit of Britain's Imperial Camel Company

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improvised a cavalry charge to break Ottoman lines and reach the strategic wells. Some 800 cavalymen of the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade lined up for what proved the largest cavalry charge of the First World War.

The charge of the Australian Light Horse was the last thing that Gallipoli veteran Emin Çöl ever saw. From their positions in the trenches, Çöl and his comrades fired on the galloping cavalymen until they swept over Turkish lines. Though still conscious, Çöl suddenly lost his vision. He had been wounded and could feel blood streaming down his face. A comrade bandaged his wounds and took him to a sheltered spot before surrendering. "They told me that two British soldiers were approaching us," Çöl later recorded in his memoirs. "They took my hand and made me come out of the trench." Çöl regained his liberty at the end of the war, but he never recovered his sight.



**STANDARD BEARER**

Turkish troops at Gallipoli in 1915. Victory here preceded the Ottoman empire's struggle for control of Palestine

Ottomans and their German allies prepared to withdraw from the last secure road to the east. All sides were averse to fighting in Jerusalem, unwilling to face the international condemnation that inevitably would result from damage done to sites sacred to the three Abrahamic religions. The Turks began their retreat after sundown on 8 December. By sunrise on 9 December, 401 years of Ottoman rule in Jerusalem had come to an end.

Allenby made his entry into Jerusalem two days later, on 11 December. The War Office Cinematograph Committee filmed the carefully staged event to ensure the widest possible audience for the greatest victory of the war to date. This was, after all, prime minister Lloyd George's "Christmas present" to the war-weary British nation. Allenby's words on the day had been carefully scripted in London and telegraphed to him in Palestine. The British commander was even ordered to dismount to enter the holy city on foot, a gesture of humility to appeal to Christians back home.

As he entered Jerusalem, Allenby passed through a guard of honour representing each of the nations whose soldiers had fought in Palestine: England, Wales, Scotland, India, Australia and New Zealand, plus 20 French and 20 Italian soldiers representing Britain's other wartime allies. Among the dignitaries in Allenby's entourage was the fêted British Army officer TE Lawrence – aka Lawrence of Arabia – who had arrived to co-ordinate strategy between Allenby's victorious army and the Arab Revolt.

The fall of Jerusalem marked a major turning point in the First World War in the Middle East. The loss of the holy city was a great blow to the Ottomans, coming after the surrender of Mecca to the Hashemite-led Arab Revolt in 1916 and the British conquest of Baghdad in March 1917. Yet the Turks continued to show the tenacity that had marked their performance in the war, forcing the British to fight for another year before yielding the remainder of Palestine and Damascus to Allenby's forces in October 1918. ■

**T**he capture of Beersheba was the breakthrough that led to the British conquest of Palestine. Ottoman positions in Gaza were left vulnerable to attacks from both the south and east. Still operating under total secrecy and subterfuge, Allenby unleashed a massive attack on Ottoman positions halfway between Gaza and Beersheba, and succeeded in breaching Turkish lines at several points. By 7 November, the Ottomans were in full retreat.

The Anzac Mounted Division pursued the Ottomans up the Mediterranean coastline, while British forces captured a vital railway junction to the south of Jerusalem on 14 November. The next day, the Anzac Mounted Division occupied Ramla and Lidda, while the Australian Mounted Division took Latrun. Two days later, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade occupied the port of Jaffa. Isolated from the south and west, Jerusalem couldn't be defended.

As British forces progressively secured the southern, western and northern approaches to Jerusalem, the

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## Both sides knew that fighting in Jerusalem would provoke international condemnation





**IN HIS SIGHTS**

With tensions very high in Palestine by 1938, a British soldier keeps watch over Jerusalem's Old City



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# *The* Next Imperial Frontier

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Britain's administration of Palestine was formalised by the British Mandate. But, as **JACOB NORRIS** explains, it led to the deep divisions that still define the Middle East

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**I**n August 1918, Palestine was in chaos. Allied forces controlled the southern half of the country, while most of the north remained in Ottoman hands. But whichever army was formally in control, the reality was one of lawlessness, famine and disease. Against this backdrop, the British government did something curious. It sent one of its leading imperial geologists to the front line of the

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fighting to investigate the potential for mineral mining at the Dead Sea. The geologist was the Canadian Major Brock. For two weeks, he and his team braved Ottoman snipers and temperatures of up to 120°F. By early September, he was back in London, analysing samples of soil and water in government laboratories. His subsequent report concluded there was great potential for “a large and profitable industry” at the Dead Sea.

Why was the British government in such a hurry to survey the area's

mineral resources in 1918? Looking at the reasons opens up a new interpretation of its presence in Palestine. The British Mandate – the League of Nations-ratified commission authorising the administration of Palestine by Britain – is usually regarded as part of the story of Arab-Zionist conflict, with the debate centred on which side Britain favoured and why it was unable to stem the rising tide of nationalist violence. But rarely do we consider its imperialist dimensions. →



## Timeline of the British Mandate 1920–33

**4–5 April 1920**

**Riots in Jerusalem** during the Nabi Musa festival. The first significant outbreak of violence since the British takeover in 1917, largely the result of Arab disgruntlement over Britain's early support for Zionism.

British soldiers play peacekeeper during the Jerusalem riots of 1920



**24 July 1922**

**The Supreme Council of the League of Nations approves the British Mandate in Palestine.** In reality, Britain had been running the country with a civilian government since 1920.

LEFT: Jewish settlers' homes in Palestine, around 1920

BELOW: Two Palestinian girls carry water home from a fountain, c1920



Brock's survey in 1918 was the culmination of over a century of western exploration of the Dead Sea area, much of which speculated on the commercial potential of this ancient, hypersaline lake. In 1879, the Scottish colonialist Lawrence Oliphant epitomised this when he wrote that "there can be little doubt that the Dead Sea is a mine of unexplored wealth, which only needs the application of capital and enterprise to make it a most lucrative property".

In 1918, these dreams began to seem more realistic. The First World War had brought home the potential of empire like never before. A generation of "new imperialists" now wielded influence in the British government. Politicians like Leo Amery, William Ormsby-Gore and Mark Sykes drove Britain's expansion into the Middle East. Most of them were staunchly pro-Zionist and played key roles in the drafting of the Balfour Declaration, the 1917 announcement by the foreign secretary Arthur Balfour that supported a separate

Jewish state. But this outlook was based on strictly imperialist goals. As Ormsby-Gore would later comment as colonial secretary, Zionism was only useful if it could create in Palestine "a well-to-do, educated, modern Jewish community, ultimately bound to be dependent on the British empire".

**T**he essence of the new imperialist enthusiasm for British rule in Palestine had nothing to do with Jewish nationalism. Rather, they viewed Palestine within a wider vision of a more integrated empire capable of meeting its own economic needs. The founding father of their ideology was Joseph Chamberlain, colonial secretary from 1895 to 1903, who had urged the need to exploit Britain's "undeveloped estates".

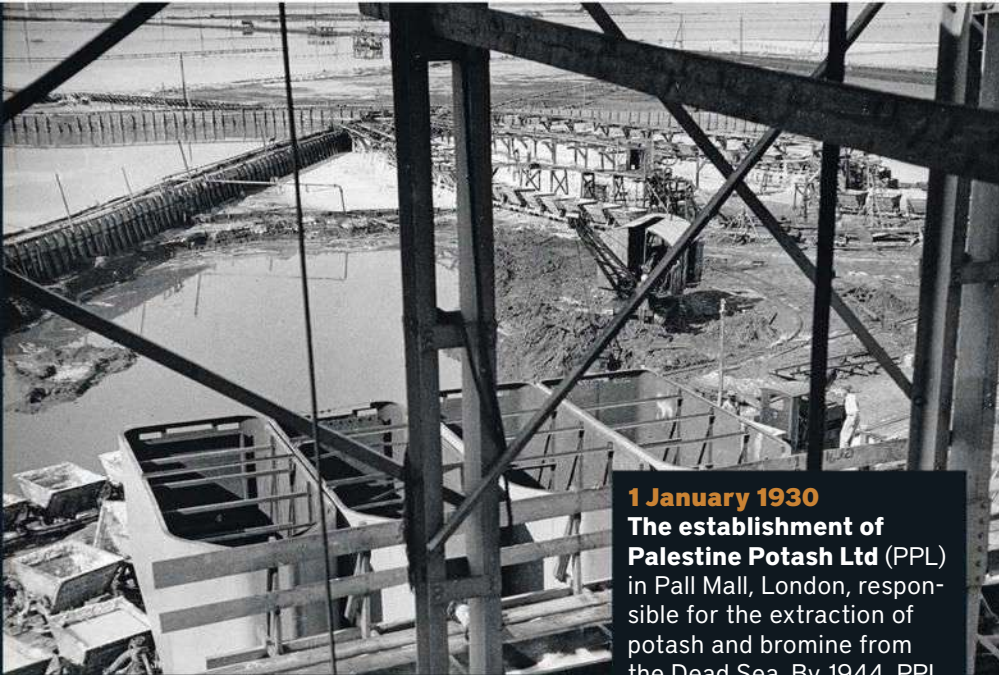
During the First World War, the new imperialists began to put Chamberlain's ideas into action. Survey teams were dispatched all over

the empire to satisfy the wartime need for resources. Most famously, the geologist Albert Kitson discovered large deposits of bauxite and manganese in West Africa's Gold Coast (what is present-day Ghana).

It is in this wider imperial search for resources that we should view Major Brock's mission to Palestine in 1918. He stressed the potential imperial value of the potash and bromine he found in the Dead Sea waters. "A successful industry of this kind would be invaluable," he wrote, "for it would not only ensure a permanent supply of cheap potash, essential for agriculture and other industries, but make us independent of any foreign source."

The search for Dead Sea minerals was just one part of Britain's imperial





**31 October 1933**

**The opening of Haifa's new deep-water harbour.** The following year sees the completion of the Haifa-Mosul oil pipeline.

BELOW: The Haifa-Mosul pipeline linked the oilfields of northern Iraq with the Mediterranean



**1 January 1930**

**The establishment of Palestine Potash Ltd (PPL)** in Pall Mall, London, responsible for the extraction of potash and bromine from the Dead Sea. By 1944, PPL is Britain's largest supplier of these vital minerals used in agriculture, motor fuels and pharmaceuticals.

ABOVE: A potash factory in around 1930. Potash was a crucial aspect of the British presence in Palestine

**August 1929**

**The Wailing Wall riots,** sparked by tension between Muslims and Jews over access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Violence quickly spreads to Hebron, Safed and other urban centres. At least 250 people are killed.

vision for Palestine. Key to the extraction of natural resources was the creation of new routes of infrastructure. To this end, British planners had identified Haifa as a key imperial port as early as 1915. By the end of the war, Haifa had also become the headquarters of a much expanded railway network. Almost overnight this sleepy fishing village was transformed into a hub of British imperial communications.

Haifa's importance was predicated on natural resources, but not only those in Palestine. The realisation that the Mosul province of northern Iraq was rich in oil meant that an exit point would be needed on the Mediterranean coastline. For this

reason, Britain pushed hard in its wartime negotiations with the French to ensure Palestine would be linked to northern Iraq – what Mark Sykes referred to as “a strip of territory from Haifa to Mosul.”

**P**alestine's subsequent descent into nationalist conflict has tended to obscure these imperialist motivations. According to the League of Nations, Britain was not even a colonial power in Palestine. Instead its role was to help the country prepare for “national self-determination”. How to define national self-determination was a complicated business in Palestine.

Britain's initial support for Zionist immigration from Europe was in conflict with the emerging goals of Arab nationalism and its call for an independent Arab state in Palestine. This created what historians refer to as Britain's “dual obligation”.

From the beginning of the mandate, it became clear the dual obligation was unworkable. As early as 1920 and 1921 there were major outbreaks of violence in the two largest cities, Jerusalem and Jaffa, as a direct result of Arab unease over the political aspirations of the Zionist movement.

In a sense, Britain was now locked into an impossible role as mediator in a conflict it had helped create. Where once Jews could be Palestinians and even considered Arab, now a clear fault line had opened. The Balfour Declaration had stirred Zionist expectations of a specifically Jewish state in Palestine. The new Jewish immigrants, hailing mainly from eastern Europe and Russia, were disconnected from local culture.

**Britain was now in an impossible position, the mediator in a conflict it had helped create**



## Timeline of the British Mandate 1936–48



**1936–39**

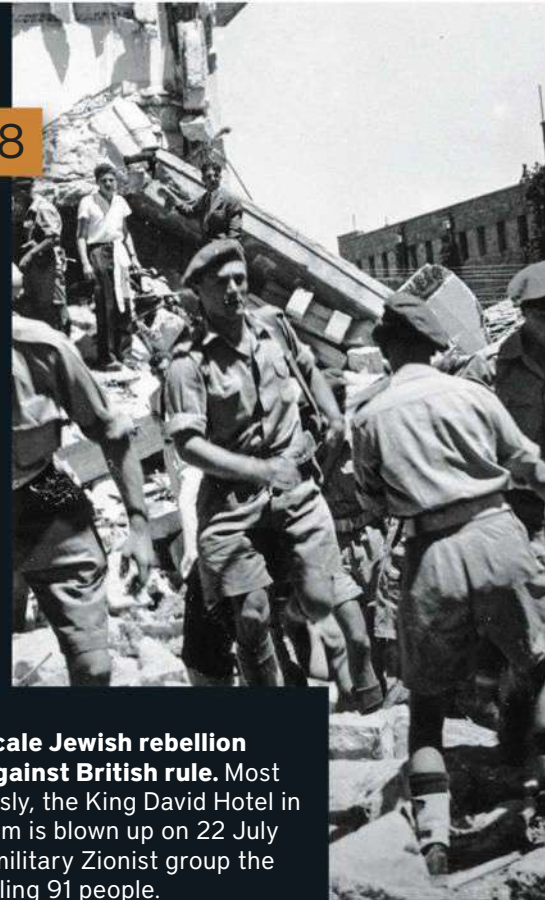
### **The Great Arab Revolt sweeps the country.**

After an initial campaign of civil disobedience, the revolt becomes more violent in its second phase. Britain's counter-insurgency (above) eventually crushes the rebel movement and removes the Arab national leadership.

**17 May 1939**

### **The MacDonald White Paper.**

In an effort to win back Arab support, Britain sets a fixed limit on Jewish immigration (75,000 over five years), after which time the level would be dependent on Arab approval. After 10 years, Palestine would also become fully independent under majority rule.



**1946**

### **A full-scale Jewish rebellion rages against British rule.**

Most notoriously, the King David Hotel in Jerusalem is blown up on 22 July by paramilitary Zionist group the Irgun, killing 91 people.

Soon all Jews in Palestine were tarnished with the same brush in the eyes of the Arab community.

At various stages of the mandate, the British placed greater restrictions on Jewish immigration, but it wasn't until 1939 that the basic tenets of the Balfour policy were seriously questioned. By then, Palestine was well on the way to all-out civil war. The Jewish population had risen from 11 per cent at the start of the mandate to around 30 per cent by 1939, nearly two decades later. The Zionist community was now a well-organised, well-armed state-in-waiting.

In the meantime, the Arab community had launched a national rebellion in 1936. The British

counterinsurgency was brutal in the extreme, targeting the wider civilian population in an effort to crush popular support for the rebels.

The effect was the opposite. Britain's widespread use of torture and collective punishment only served to further alienate the Arab population and prolong the rebellion. It was only through the deployment of 20,000 imperial troops that the revolt was finally put down in 1939 (see page 90 for more on this revolt).

As the prospect of war in Europe loomed large, Britain could no longer afford to maintain such a large military garrison in the Middle East. Indignation over Palestinian suffering was now a regional Arab concern,

particularly for Britain's ally, Saudi Arabia. An olive branch was needed to allow the redeployment of British troops to Europe. This came in the form of a 1939 policy statement that set a clear timetable for Palestinian independence under majority rule, at that time still Arab.

The tables were now turned and a Zionist backlash was inevitable. A truce was declared during the Second World War, but the Jewish community was soon mobilising in preparation for full-scale rebellion. The stage was set for an ugly British withdrawal from Palestine and the subsequent Arab-Israeli War of 1948.

As much as these events have shaped the modern history of the Middle East, Britain's role in Palestine is distorted if we only consider it as referee between two warring sides. The 'dual obligation' model hides the fact that Britain's only real duty was to its own imperial interests. At the close of the First World War, Palestine and the wider Middle East had generated great

# The Zionist community was now a well-organised, well-armed state-in-waiting





British soldiers carry casualties from Jerusalem's King David Hotel after its bombing by Zionist paramilitaries

### 25 February 1947

British foreign minister Ernest Bevin announces **the government's intention to hand over the Palestine problem to the United Nations**. During June and July, a UN special committee visits Palestine, recommending the partition of the country into separate Jewish and Arab states.

Armed Arabs survey a burning truck outside Jerusalem in c1948, the same year that the British Mandate was terminated



### 29 November 1947

**The UN General Assembly endorses the partition plan**, leading to Jewish celebrations and Arab condemnation. Britain announces it will end its mandate at midnight on 14 May 1948. The stage is set for the creation of Israel, the displacement of nearly a million Palestinians and the first Arab-Israeli war.

excitement among a new generation of imperialists eager to exploit the 'undeveloped estates' of the empire.

Subsequent events left much of that vision unfulfilled, but there were genuine imperial success stories in Palestine. At the Dead Sea, the "large and profitable industry" Brock had predicted became a reality. Run by Zionist engineers, Palestine Potash Ltd was a British-controlled company that helped break the empire's previous reliance on French and German supplies of potash. As *The Sunday Times* enthused in 1927, "no greater commercial enterprise in natural resources has been consummated within recent years, than that which now gives to a British corporation control of one of the world's biggest and most valuable stretches of untapped riches." The Dead Sea enterprise proved absolutely vital to Britain's war effort in the Second World War, providing half of all Britain's potash supplies.

Meanwhile Haifa continued to expand as the regional hub of imperial communications. By 1933, Britain had completed its flagship deep-water harbour, making Haifa the biggest British naval base in the eastern Mediterranean. The following year saw the completion of the oil pipeline from Mosul with its terminus at Haifa. By 1939, an oil refinery had been added alongside a new airport and rail terminus.

These images of imperial modernity are not what immediately comes to mind when we think of the British Mandate in Palestine. But anyone visiting the Dead Sea and Haifa today cannot help but be struck by the legacy of Britain's imperial vision. Under Israeli control, the industrial infrastructure at these sites has greatly expanded since 1948. But cross into the occupied Palestinian territories and you are reminded that Britain's legacy has produced distinct winners and losers.

Perhaps the idea of Britain struggling with a 'dual obligation'

is a convenient narrative for a country that has never really faced up to its historical role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The reality is that Britain bears a heavy responsibility for this tragic conflict. By opening the door to Zionist immigration and state-building in Palestine, the British Mandate produced a divided society in which 'Jewish' and 'Arab' became inherently oppositional categories, where once they had comfortably coexisted.

Historians have only recently begun to place this process in a bigger imperial picture. British policy-makers did not back the Zionist movement out of a desire for Jewish national self-determination. They did so largely because they saw Jews as the ideal drivers of development on the next imperial frontier. As the imperialist journal, *The Round Table*, enthused in 1917: "With increasing Jewish immigration and improved facilities, this work should proceed apace, until at last the potentialities of the country are realized to the full." ■



# Revolt *and*

The violent protests by Palestinian Arabs between 1936 and 1939 called for independent rule and an end to Jewish immigration. **CHARLES TOWNSHEND** chronicles the bloody uprising against the British





# Rebellion

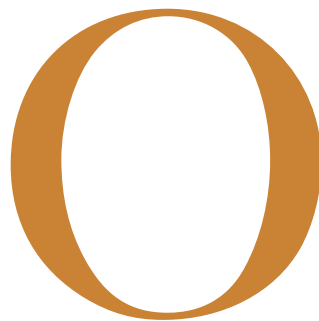


## OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

During the early days of the uprising in 1936, supporters in the town of Abu Ghosh pledge their commitment to the cause of Palestinian Arabs







On the evening of 15 April 1936, in the hills east of Tulkarm in northern Palestine, armed Arabs set up a roadblock on the winding road from Nablus. They stopped all drivers, demanding they contributed to the group's funds. When a convoy of Jewish trucks appeared, they shot the drivers. One died on the spot, a second a few days later. The day after the attack, a group of 'revisionist' Zionists called Irgun Bet shot dead two Arabs in a hut outside the Jewish settlement of Petah Tikvah. The following day, 17 April, the funeral of the first of the Jewish drivers to die took place in Tel Aviv, Palestine's leading Jewish town. The funeral turned into an angry demonstration against both the Arabs and the British authorities. Several Arabs were attacked in the streets, and a policeman who tried to protect one was severely beaten.

By 19 April, the whole Jaffa area was in uproar. Arabs attacked Jewish houses and businesses, and thousands of Jews fled to Tel Aviv. That night, representatives of the main Palestinian national groupings met in Nablus and launched a four-day general strike; six days later, they met again, in Jerusalem, to establish an eight-strong Arab Higher Committee (AHC). The Arab demands were simple: no more Jewish immigration; no more sales of land to Jews; and the establishment of representative government.

The six-month strike was, in the words of historian Benny Morris, "the most significant demonstration of Palestinian-Arab nationalist feeling ever". It had been a long time coming. When the idea of a "national home for the Jewish people in Palestine" was announced by the British government in 1917's Balfour Declaration, most of the Arabs of Palestine thought of themselves as part of Syria, where the Arab nationalist movement was centred. In detaching Palestine as a separate British Mandate, the western powers forced them back on their own, undeveloped political resources. If they wanted to resist the Zionist movement – and it was clear that they did – they would have to create a new national political organisation.

The process was slowed by the resolute refusal of Arab national leaders to play the political game designed for them by the British. Britain's idea was to set up a legislative assembly, which would allow the Arabs to learn the business of representative democracy. But this assembly would not have the power to dispute the principle of the Jewish national home, which was the basis of the British Mandate for Palestine. Arab leaders refused to take part in elections—or even in the census to establish the electorate—unless the Balfour Declaration was withdrawn.

Even before the Mandate was established, Britain had become acutely aware of violent Arab reactions to Jewish immigration and, to the dismay of Zionists, always tried to set strict limits on the numbers of Jews entering Palestine. In the 1930s, though, these limits were stretched as Nazi persecution intensified. Between 1932 and 1936, an estimated 60,000 Jews entered Palestine each year and, as the Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion frankly said, every Arab could do the math to see that at this rate there would eventually be a Jewish majority – and a Jewish state.

Alongside immigration, Arab fears of Jewish domination were heightened by Jewish acquisition of land, often from Arab landlords who did well out of the process. The rapidly expanding Jewish economy offered jobs exclusively to Jewry – a key tenet of Zionism – increasing Arab unemployment. Finally, and perhaps crucially, the last attempt to create a legislative council with an Arab majority, by high commissioner Arthur Wauchope in December 1935, was defeated in the British parliament early in 1936. Arabs, who had finally accepted the legislative council idea when they saw how hostile the Zionists were to it, believed that Jewish members of parliament in the British House of Commons, combined with global Zionist pressure, had blocked the path to democracy.

Britain always tried to run Palestine on the cheap, like the rest of its empire. But Palestine was not a colony; it was an international trusteeship. To deliver on the Balfour Declaration, Britain needed to provide real support for Arab economic development to match that of the international Zionist movement for the Jews. It never did so. Governmental parsimony extended to the security forces in Palestine, which were run not by the army but by the

## The British preferred to describe the rebellion as banditry, criminality and disorder





**CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE** The streets of Jaffa were a hotbed of unrest. In June 1936, the mass demolition of parts of the city by the British left thousands of Palestinian Arabs homeless

Royal Air Force. When violence began to spread in 1936, there were only a few hundred British troops in the country, far too few to choke it off before it grew.

**T**he armed Arab group that executed those Jewish truck drivers in 1936 were probably Qassamites, followers of the militant sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam who set up a guerrilla force in the early 1930s. Dismissed by the British as a gangster, bandit or fanatic, but seen by many Palestinians as a *mujahid*, a holy warrior, Qassam was killed in a gunfight with police late in 1935. The impact of his death was huge: many saw him as a national martyr. He was the first Arab leader to insist that armed struggle was the only way to defeat British rule and his grave outside Haifa became a pilgrimage site.

For six months, from April to October 1936, the general strike, followed by a refusal to pay taxes and reinforced by a proliferation of armed groups operating in rural areas, grew into an ever more substantial revolt. Arabs called it a rebellion or revolution (*thawra*) from an early stage. When the well-known Iraq army officer Fawzi al-Qawukji arrived in Palestine and proclaimed himself commander-in-chief of the national forces, it looked as if a new level of cohesion was being achieved. The British authorities and the Zionist leaders

preferred to describe the upsurge of violence as something different: banditry, criminality, or riots and disorders.

The British were not as pro-Zionist as Arabs thought, but manifestations of armed resistance were put down with exemplary force. Village searches, “ostensibly for arms and ammunition”, as the British commander Air-Vice-Marshal Richard Peirse noted, were actually intended to punish and terrorise the population. In Jaffa, the army drove two wide roads through the city in June 1936, ostensibly for public health reasons but really to provide a way of controlling the ‘rabbit warren’ of narrow streets. The massive series of demolitions made thousands homeless.

In October, a combination of pressure from neighbouring pro-British Arab states, the arrival of large-scale military reinforcements and the British announcement of a royal commission to investigate the Palestine situation, led the AHC to call off the general strike. Palestine became fairly quiet while the commission sat, but its report in July 1937 – admitting that the Balfour Declaration could not be fulfilled and proposing that Palestine should be partitioned – triggered a second phase of armed action. The British district commissioner for the Galilee, an Arab area that would, under the partition proposal, have been placed in the Jewish state, was assassinated in September, and armed bands multiplied, perhaps reaching a total strength of 15,000. Their programme became more radical, levying taxes, setting up law courts, declaring a moratorium on the debts



On his death in 1935, the militant Izz al-Din al-Qassam became a national martyr





**HUMAN CARGO** In August 1939, the ship *Parita* lands on a sandbank off the Tel Aviv coast, carrying 850 Jewish refugees. Around a quarter of a million Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine during the period of the Palestinian Arab uprising



**PUBLIC PROTEST** Anti-Zionist feeling had been building for decades. This is a mass demonstration held in Jerusalem back in 1920



← **THE CLAMPDOWN**  
A British armoured railroad wagon observes two Arab hostages aboard a railcar

↑ **FANNING THE FLAMES**  
Crowds watch as a Jewish house in Tel Aviv burns in 1936, having been set ablaze by Arab activists



BILDARCHIV PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ / SHUTTERSTOCK / GETTY IMAGES



of the *fellahin* (peasantry), and forcing people to stop wearing the Ottoman fez in favour of the *kaffiyah*, the headscarf of the desert Arabs.

The rebellion's central focus was in the 'triangle of terror' created by the cities of Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarm, which became in effect a liberated area. Indeed, when a senior military officer toured Palestine in October 1938, he concluded that "civil government has completely broken down" across the whole country.

But the rebels did not succeed in establishing a unified political front or a credible counter-state structure. Modern, middle-class nationalist political groups, such as one known as Istiqlal, remained weak. Increasingly, the rebel movement became not just rural, but anti-urban; the old Arab leadership, the notables, were displaced by the *fellahin*. The forced adoption of the *kaffiyah* was a symbol of this social revolution, much disliked in the towns where it was abandoned when the rebellion ended.

The British response became ever rougher. Collective punishment of the ordinary Arab population was resisted by the 'civil obstructionists' – government officials who saw it as unjustifiable. The army, however, insisted that (in the words of the commander-in-chief) it was "the only method of impressing on the peaceful but terrorised majority that failure to assist law and order may in the long run be more unpleasant than submitting to intimidation".

Things certainly became more unpleasant quite rapidly. Village searches became still more punitive and frequent, while the casual brutality of police and troops alike was tolerated by most commanders and encouraged by some. Hostages were forced to sit on the bonnets of military vehicles or on trolleys in front of trains to deter ambushes or absorb the impact of improvised explosive devices. In two villages – al-Bassa near Acre and Halhul near Hebron – troops went beyond brutality to atrocity. At the first, on



Demonstrators protest against a Jewish homeland. Their banner reads: "Palestine for the Arabs"

the assumption that the inhabitants knew of roadside bombs, they not only machine-gunned and destroyed the village, but allegedly forced villagers to board a bus and drive it over a land mine. At Halhul in May 1939, villagers – presumably to encourage them to hand over rifles supposedly held in the village – were placed in a cage in full sunlight, with just a half-pint of water a day. At least 11 died.

In the end, a combination of British military pressure – stepped up again when the number of troops was doubled (to 25,000) in late 1938 – and the fragmentation of the rebel forces caused the rebellion to peter out. Although rural leaders set up a high council of command in August 1938, any real hope of unifying the local guerrilla groups into a coherent national one had disappeared. The appearance of so-called 'peace bands', seen as government stooges by the rebels, turned the conflict increasingly into a Palestinian civil war.

As the rebellion was disintegrating, Britain announced a dramatic policy shift, restricting Jewish immigration and promising majority government in five years' time. The 1939 white paper, a government document recommending the abandonment of the partition of Palestine, was a recognition that the rebellion had represented a genuine national movement, and it seemed to give the Arabs political victory in military defeat. But it was never implemented: the Second World War and, above all, the Holocaust, changed everything.

In 1945, Britain could no longer make policy for Palestine without US support, which it did not get. Three years later, when the British abandoned the Mandate, the issue would be decided by armed force. The crushing of the rebellion ensured that surviving Palestinian Arab military groups would be no match for their Jewish opponents (many of whom had been armed by the British). The Zionist victory, the creation of the state of Israel and the mass exodus of Arabs amazed many outsiders, but to those who knew the country, it hardly came as a surprise. It had been 30 years in the making: 30 years of British responsibility for Palestine. ■

Villagers were placed in a cage in full sunlight, with just a half-pint of water a day. At least 11 died



# The Six-Day War

The Arab-Israeli Six-Day War of 1967 reshaped the landscape of the Middle East. The conflict was, as **MATTHEW HUGHES** explains, nothing short of a political and military earthquake

DAVID RUBINGER-CORBIS





#### OPENING SKIRMISHES

On the first day of what became known as the Six-Day War, nearly 200 Israeli warplanes launched a surprise attack on Egyptian forces, including this army truck and its driver





In June 1967, the Israeli armed forces crushed the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria in a lightning six-day war in which Israeli warplanes wiped out enemy air forces – mostly on the ground – after which their tanks and infantry swept out and conquered the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the old walled city of Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Without their warplanes to protect them, Arab soldiers in open, desert country were pounded from the air; many were burned alive in napalm strikes as they retreated across the Sinai, the vast triangular peninsula in Egypt.

The war was a military and political earthquake. For the loss of up to 983 soldiers, Israel had humiliated its enemies and their pan-Arab nationalist Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser. (Arab losses were much higher, running into the thousands. Estimates suggest more than 10,000 killed and missing for Egypt and 6,000 for Jordan, accurate statistics for the Arab side being hard to come by.)

Photographs from the war show the faces of jubilant Israeli soldiers from a conquering army. Israel had massively expanded its territory to the natural frontiers of the Suez Canal, the Jordan river and the mountains of the Golan Heights. The captured land was a buffer zone for Israel in any future war with neighbouring Arab states, there to absorb any attack and give Israel time to mobilise, as would happen in the next war in 1973. The euphoria of victory hid the fact that the occupied land was home to some 1.5 million Palestinians who would now be living under Israeli military occupation in a Jewish state. (As one Israeli leader aptly remarked regarding Palestinian land, Israel wanted the dowry but not the bride.)

There was also the question of Jerusalem. The Israelis quickly annexed the Old City, within which were key holy sites, notably the remnants of the lost Jewish temple known as the Har Habayit (Temple Mount, the western wall of which is the Wailing Wall), the most holy place for Jews, directly atop of which sat the holy Muslim Haram al-Sharif (the 'Noble Sanctuary') with its Dome of the Rock silhouetting the Old City. The capture of the Wailing Wall was momentous, with Jews hurrying to the site to worship

and removing local Palestinian housing to expand the area for prayer. The place became an insurmountable obstacle to any peace deal as both sides wanted it.

The 1967 war was the third clash in a set of Arab-Israeli wars that have continued to the present day. There had been two previous wars in 1948–49 and 1956 (after which the United Nations stationed peacekeeping troops in the Sinai) and there would be further conflicts in 1969–70, 1973, 1982 and 2006. Of all these, the one in 1967 was the one that neither side wanted. Instead, they fell into the abyss of war. How did this happen? Two key drivers for the 1967 war – security and legitimacy – worked alongside poor, confused diplomacy in the months immediately before June 1967 to cause the war.

For Israel, a young, small country with no strategic depth – and confronted by a united anti-Israeli Arab bloc armed by the Soviet Union and led by a charismatic figure, Nasser, bent on destroying the Jewish state – security was paramount. Israel felt that it had to defend itself in the face of an external, existential, anti-Semitic threat from what it considered to be monolithic Arab opposition, and so launched a pre-emptive strike in June 1967 when encircled and faced with a multi-front war. This was how Israelis perceived the war in 1967, a view supported by years of border clashes when enemy soldiers and Palestinian guerrillas struck into Israel. Behind Arab military power, there was the menace of pan-Arabism and anti-Israeli rhetoric from bombastic leaders such as Nasser.

The other side saw Israel as an aggressive, illegitimate state, founded on the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 and never recognised by the Arab states. After the 1948–49 war, there were armistices between the two sides, but no peace treaties. Indeed, Israel had no formal diplomatic relations with any Arab state until 1979 when Egypt signed the first peace deal with Israel. Instead of an external Arab threat causing war, aggressive internal Israeli politics from a militarised, colonial Jewish state – what has been called the Israeli 'iron wall' – meant that Israel was looking for trouble, escalating endemic border clashes to provoke its Arab neighbours and forcing them into a war, at which point superior Israeli military might would go into action. Israeli military power would keep

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## Of all the Arab–Israeli wars, 1967 was the conflict that neither side actually wanted

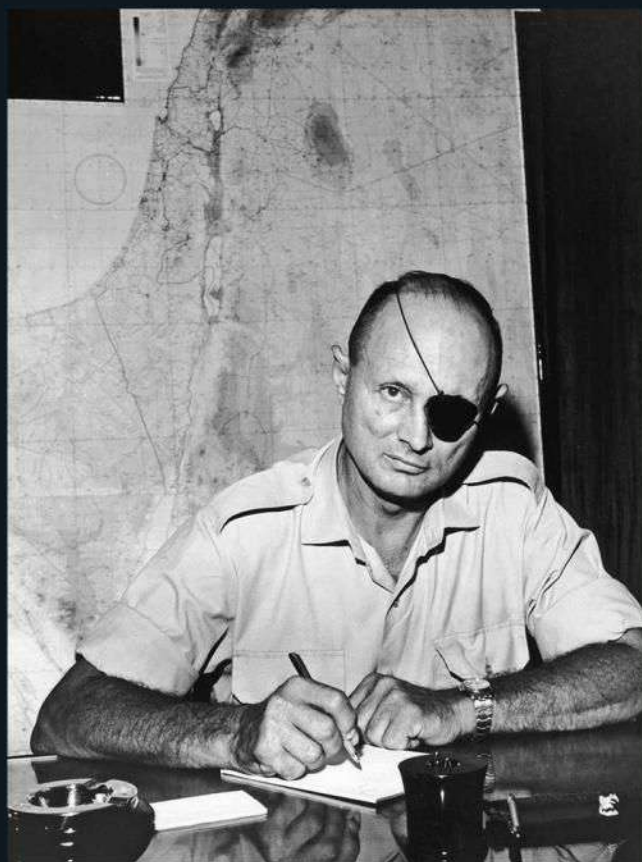


### STAKING A CLAIM

Israeli soldiers display their country's flag following the invasion of the Sinai Desert in Egypt in June 1967



**DONE DEAL** King Hussein of Jordan (left) and Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser smile for the cameras having just signed a joint defence agreement in Cairo ahead of the Six-Day War



**FRONT-PAGE NEWS** As defence minister during the Six-Day War, General Moshe Dayan's role in the Israeli victory meant his distinctive features graced the cover of *Time* that same month







**DEVASTATION ON THE GROUND** Egyptian MiG-21 jet fighters lie destroyed on the tarmac of their base following the early-morning strikes by Israeli aircraft on the first day of the Six-Day War, on 5 June 1967. By the end of the day, Egypt had lost some 300 of its warplanes

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the country safe and was preferred over diplomacy. Expanded territory provided security and space for more Jewish settlement of Palestinian lands.

An eliminationist threat to Israel versus an aggressive, trigger-finger Israel give overarching answers to the question of why Israel and the neighbouring Arab states have fought so many wars. But what of the actual history of the 1967 war? The events leading up to that June provide the satisfying detailed historical explanation as to why war happened and allow us to test these two contending pro- and anti-Israeli viewpoints.



#### TOP-LEVEL VISIT

Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol visits the Syrian front during the 1967 conflict. He died in office less than two years later

against Israel, but the best units in his army were away fighting another war in Yemen. He also knew that Israel was stronger militarily.

Nevertheless, Nasser then made fateful decisions designed to show the wider Arab world that he was in charge: he moved troops into the Sinai; he asked the United Nations peacekeeping force that had been in the region for a decade to leave; and he closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, blockading the Israeli port of Eilat.

Israel had long said that closing passage through Tiran would be a cause for war. Nasser's gamble to appear strong failed, terribly. The Israelis relied on the deterrence factor of their armed forces and for two weeks they waited in fear – memories of the Holocaust fresh in many people's minds – while their prime minister, Levi Eshkol, dithered. Military pressure on Eshkol intensified, with Israeli commanders keen to take the initiative with decisive action against Egypt before it was too late. Israel's foreign intelligence service, Mossad, reported that the United States would welcome a strike against Nasser – another Soviet ally – and, on 4 June, the Israeli cabinet agreed on war. Mutual distrust, dismal diplomacy by Nasser, Soviet deceit, fears inside Israel of possible destruction, and the pressure of 'hawks' within the Israeli government combined to make war seemingly inevitable.

At 7:45am on 5 June, almost 200 Israeli warplanes (many supplied by France) launched the assault with a devastating aerial sweep in from the sea and the west into Egypt, catching Egyptian pilots on the ground having their breakfast. This was Israel's 'Operation Moked'. The Egyptians were utterly unprepared, their radar turned off. Also, the Israelis were coming in from an unexpected direction, not from the east as expected.

By the end of the day, the Egyptian air force had lost some 300 of its warplanes. The lack of protective air cover exposed Egyptian troops in the Sinai to subsequent Israeli air and tank assaults, and units fell apart as men fled back to the Suez Canal. The Israeli army pushed all the way to the wide defensive width of the canal, as well as occupying

War was certainly not inevitable in June 1967. A crisis slide from early 1967 transformed the already poor relations between the two sides, turning the tensions along the borders into a shooting war. The countdown to war started on the Golan front with Syria. On 7 April 1967, after cross-border shelling, Israeli warplanes shot down six Syrian Soviet-supplied MiG fighters, two of them close to Damascus. Israelis were certain that the Syrians were responsible for the initial shelling. Many years later, the senior Israeli general, Moshe Dayan, claimed that Israel started 80 per cent of the border clashes – its 'Syrian Syndrome'. Elements within the Israeli high command, it seems, did not accept the 1949 border with Syria and so goaded the Syrians with provocations along an already unsettled border. What is certain is that these local skirmishes led to a full-blown war.

The Soviets strongly supported the Syrian regime and had to counter any threat to their ally in Damascus. They sent a fake report to Nasser in Egypt – the strongest Arab power – saying that the Israelis were massing for a land attack on Syria. They were not; this was a lie designed to get Nasser to do something to support the Syrians. Nasser was in a quandary as he could not afford to do nothing

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## A series of local skirmishes along the disputed Israel–Syria border led to a full-blown war







**EMOTIONAL SCENES** Israeli soldiers at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem following their capture of the city. "Nobody staged that moment," explained future prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. "Nobody prepared it and nobody was prepared for it"

the Gaza Strip, home to some 300,000 Palestinians, many of whom were refugees from the 1948 war.

The war quickly spread and, later that first morning, Jordanian guns opened up against Israel. This prompted Israel specifically to tell the Jordanian leader, King Hussein, that its fight was with Egypt and not with Jordan. Hussein then pulled himself into the war, spurred on by mischievous reports from Egypt that it was defeating Israel (Egypt, amazingly, informed Jordan that it had destroyed no less than three-quarters of the powerful Israeli air force). Hussein was also fearful of missing the boat if the Arab side was victorious, and mindful of Palestinians living on the West Bank who wanted to see Israel defeated.

Israel then turned on Jordan and, in a series of aerial sorties, destroyed its smaller air force. At the same time, Israeli troops surrounded and sealed off Jerusalem's Old City from the east. The Jordanians fought hard outside the city walls but, without air cover, were cut off. By 7 June, Israeli paratroopers pushed through the Old City's narrow alleys to the Temple Mount and Wailing Wall, the capture of which restored to the Jews the temple destroyed by the Romans. Israel's simultaneous capture of the West Bank – biblical Judea and Samaria – was also of great religious significance to the Jewish state.

Meanwhile, on the northern Syrian front, where all the trouble leading to the war had started, Syria witnessed the defeat of Egypt and Jordan, and so sought to stay out of the war, refusing a plea for help from Hussein's Jordanian army for Syrian warplanes. Nevertheless, the senior Israeli minister of defence and general, Moshe Dayan, decided to hit Syria while he could and take the strategic volcanic Golan plateau. On 9 June, Israel attacked a final time. With Egypt and Jordan defeated, the Israelis focused all their firepower on the Syrian brigades on the Golan Heights.

**T**he Soviets threatened action to support their Syrian ally, but in the end did nothing to stop the Israelis. Syrian troops resisted from strong-points on the higher slopes – some of these have been left as a memorial by the Israelis; the trenches and bunkers can be visited today – but Israeli infantry attacking from the rear overwhelmed them.

By 10 June, Syrian soldiers broke and retreated, leaving behind tons of military equipment. At the war's end, crack Israeli Golani Brigade troops landed on and took parts of Mount Hermon in the north, the peak that commanded

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**INNOCENT LIVES** At the refugee camp in Mafrag in Jordan, children displaced by the Six-Day War contemplate their uncertain futures. As they had done during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, Palestinians fled east when Israeli forces took control of the West Bank

the Golan area and that looked down on Damascus. The Israelis then fixed a new frontline on a series of volcanic hills from Hermon in the north down the Golan Heights that afforded natural defensive positions.

In a decisive campaign, Israel had seized huge areas of land, expanding its territory fourfold from 7,820 square miles on 5 June to 33,975 square miles five days later. Israeli soldiers were now just 30 miles from the Jordanian capital of Amman, 37 miles from Damascus, and perched on the Suez Canal only 68 miles from Cairo. Nasser had talked himself into a war that destroyed not just his army and prestige, but also those of the other front-line Arab states.

War had provided a military solution to the political problems of the legitimacy of Israel and the right of the Palestinians to their own nation state. Israel was triumphant; any threat was seemingly neutralised with Israeli

forces now poised close to Arab capital cities. Nasser and his allies were humiliated. While the war was firmly defensive for the Israelis, it was a war of conquest and aggression for their opponents.

On 8 June, in the middle of the war, Israeli warplanes and motor torpedo boats attacked an unarmed US spy ship, the USS *Liberty*, there to monitor the war's progress from international waters off the northern Sinai coast, killing 34 US sailors and wounding almost 200 in the attack. This was an act of war against their ally, the US. The Israelis claimed this at the time as a mistake, a tragic example of the fog of war where they thought that they were attacking an Egyptian spy ship, but recent evidence suggests that the Israelis knew that the ship was American. They didn't want Americans monitoring (and maybe halting) their offensive; the Americans afterwards threatened military action but did nothing, instead accepting

## Nasser talked himself into a war that destroyed the armies and prestige of the front-line Arab states







GETTY IMAGES

**THE GREAT DIVIDE** Under the Red Cross flag and guarded by Israeli soldiers, refugees cross the damaged Allenby Bridge. Named after the British general who captured Jerusalem, the bridge, which has since been rebuilt, spans the Jordan River between Jordan and the West Bank



Israeli compensation for the sailors killed and injured. The historian A. Jay Cristol tells the story in full in his book *The Liberty Incident: The 1967 Israeli Attack on the US Navy Spy Ship*.

**T**he 1967 victory transformed Israel and the Middle East. Initially, the Israeli government had no coherent plan for the new lands taken and, on 19 June, made an offer to withdraw with certain conditions. The Arab states rejected this offer, backing up the Israeli quip that their Arab enemy never lost an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

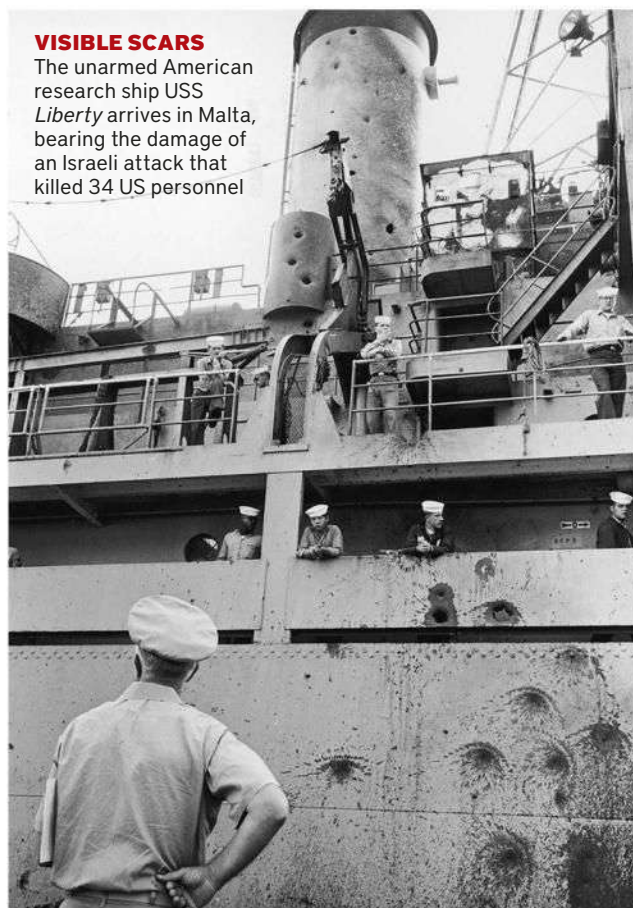
In truth, the 19 June offer was somewhat premature and, over the summer of 1967, the Israeli stance hardened, their government realising that they preferred to maintain the new borders, certainly on the Suez Canal and Golan Heights, in some form. The Israelis were less clear about what they should do with the West Bank (now minus the Old City of Jerusalem, which, by 27 June, had been annexed as Israeli sovereign territory), there being plans to give it back to Jordan or to effect some sort of Palestinian autonomy under Israeli overall control (both strategies led nowhere). In the absence of a definitive political position at the highest levels in Israel, events on the ground led the way instead.

The capture of vast swathes of territory radicalised Jewish nationalism, Zionism, from a minimalist to a maximalist position, opening up a more religious, settler-orientated, rightwing (almost messianic) Zionism, one that would see Israel's first rightwing Likud government voted in to power in 1977. In the lands conquered 10 years earlier, Israeli settlers were pitted against the existing Palestinian population, driving forward Israeli political decision-making.

The war polarised both sides, with the Israelis blocking a complete retreat and the Arab states refusing anything other than a total withdrawal to the front line of 5 June 1967. Meanwhile, the Americans stepped up their support for victorious Israel, the Soviets re-armed Egypt and Syria, and the United Nations passed Resolution 242 that

#### VISIBLE SCARS

The unarmed American research ship USS *Liberty* arrives in Malta, bearing the damage of an Israeli attack that killed 34 US personnel



demanding Israeli withdrawal but also recognised the state's right to exist.

On the Arab side, the 1967 war pushed the Palestinians to strengthen their own national forces rather than relying on defeated leaders such as Nasser, with groups like the Palestine Liberation Organisation bursting on to the world scene with spectacular terrorist actions.

The Israeli victory in the Six-Day War left the Arab side humiliated and seeking revenge. The ceasefire lines of 10 June 1967 soon became de facto borders and it would take more wars to jolt the two sides back into political dialogue, at which point the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem and the increasing Jewish settlement of occupied territory made a viable political settlement very difficult. The 1967 war was a military solution to the political problems of Israel's right to exist alongside Palestinian self-determination. The failure of postwar diplomacy polarised positions, deepened the rifts between the two sides and led to further wars. ■

GETTY IMAGES

## The failure of postwar diplomacy polarised positions, deepened rifts and led to further wars





# A brilliant rescue?

Better known as 'the raid on Entebbe', Operation Thunderbolt was an attempt by Israeli forces to liberate hostages held by hijackers. **SAUL DAVID** recalls the summer of '76





### A HERO'S WELCOME

An Israeli receives the adulation of his compatriots after the safe return of the hostages to Tel Aviv

CORBIS





On 3 July 1976, Israeli commandos carried out a daring raid to free more than 100 hostages held by pro-Palestinian terrorists at Entebbe Airport in Uganda. Ever since, the raid has been portrayed by Israelis and others as a brilliantly planned and perfectly executed hostage rescue. Yet a close study of top-secret documents and interviews with key participants reveals a very different picture: of a mission almost derailed by political and military infighting, and one whose ultimate success was heavily contingent on luck.

### Day 1 Sunday 27 June 1976

The drama began when an Air France Airbus was hijacked en route from Tel Aviv to Paris. On hearing the news, Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin set up an emergency committee and sent the Israeli Defence Forces' (IDF) elite anti-terrorist unit Sayeret Matkal ('The Unit') to Ben Gurion Airport in case the hijacked plane returned to Israel.

Instead, it was flown to Benghazi in Libya where a single female hostage was allowed to disembark after she faked a miscarriage. She told British and Israeli intelligence that the four hijackers – three men and a woman – were part of a rogue offshoot of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a terrorist organisation committed to Israel's destruction and led by Wadie Haddad. In fact, only two were Haddad's men; the others were Wilfried Böse and Brigitte

Kuhlmann, founder members of an affiliated leftwing West German terrorist group known as Revolutionary Cells (RC).

That evening, the refuelled plane left Benghazi for an unknown destination with the hijackers and 253 passengers and crew on board.

### Day 2 Monday 28 June

Just after 3am, the plane landed at Entebbe Airport in Uganda where the hijackers were joined by three more armed Palestinian terrorists. The Ugandans made no attempt to intervene because their president Idi

Amin was in league with Haddad and knew of the hijacking in advance. His soldiers helped to guard the hostages after they had been taken off the plane and put into the former departure lounge of the airport's disused old terminal.

That afternoon, Amin visited the hostages and said he was trying to secure their release. "I know that you are innocent," he told them, "but the guilty one is your government."

### Day 3 Tuesday 29 June

After lunch, the hostages were divided into two groups: Israelis and non-Israelis, though a handful of Orthodox Jews were included in the former group. This terrified the Israelis and reminded some concentration camp survivors of the wartime Nazi selections. When Michel Cojot,



#### PLANE IN DANGER

An Airbus A300B, similar to the one hijacked by terrorists in June 1976



**VOICE OF PROTEST** Relatives of the hostages arrive at Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's office to demand that negotiations be opened with the terrorists

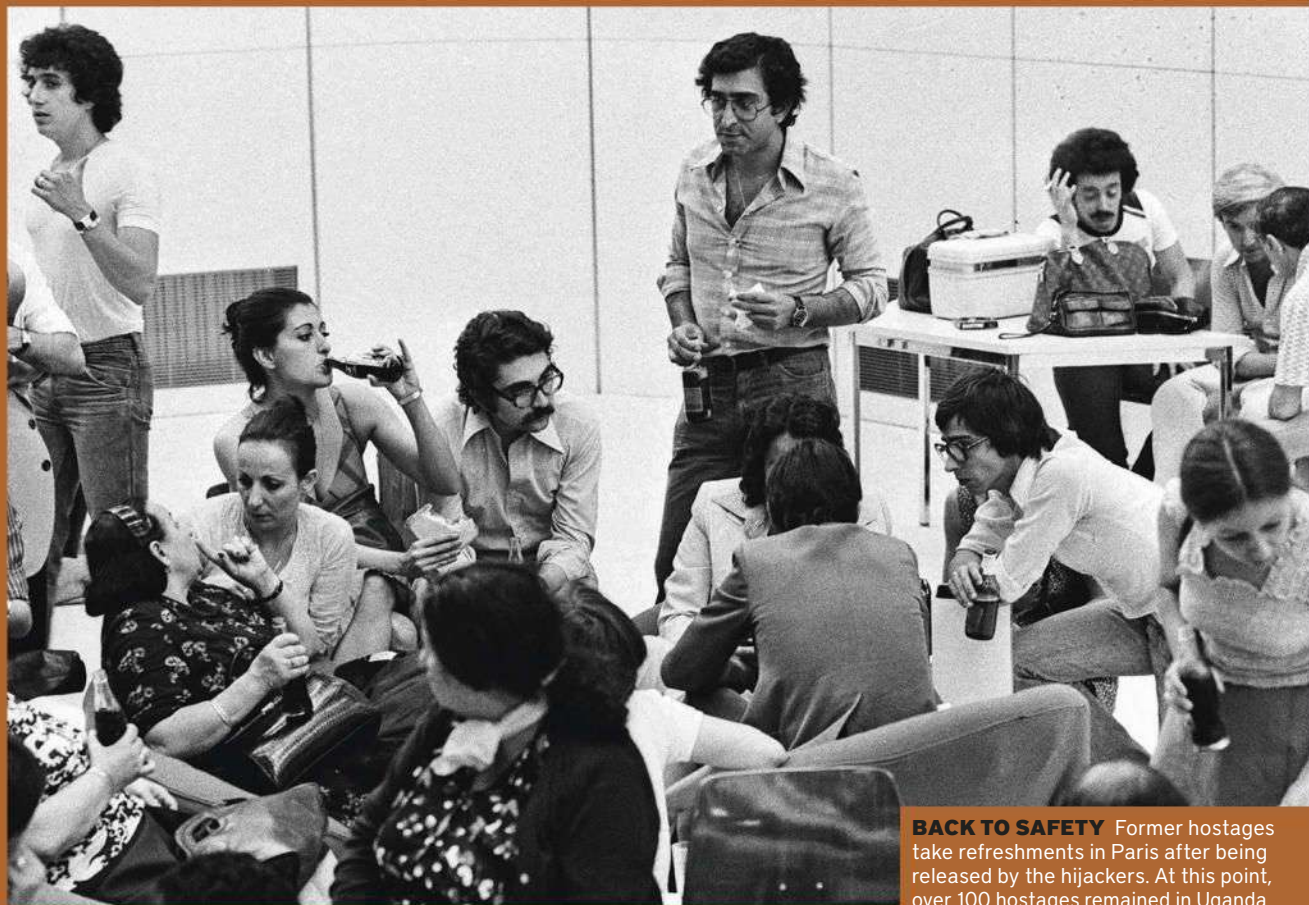
"You are innocent," Idi Amin told the hostages.  
"The guilty one is **your government**"





#### CRUCIAL INFORMATION

One of the 47 hostages who were first released arrives back in Paris. This group would provide vital intelligence for the Israelis



**BACK TO SAFETY** Former hostages take refreshments in Paris after being released by the hijackers. At this point, over 100 hostages remained in Uganda



a French Jew, encouraged some of the crew to remain with the Israelis, they refused. "We have wives and children," said one.

A couple of hours later, the terrorists told the non-Israelis that the most vulnerable would be released the following morning "for humanitarian reasons". The hostages duly drew up a list of sick and old people, and mothers with children.

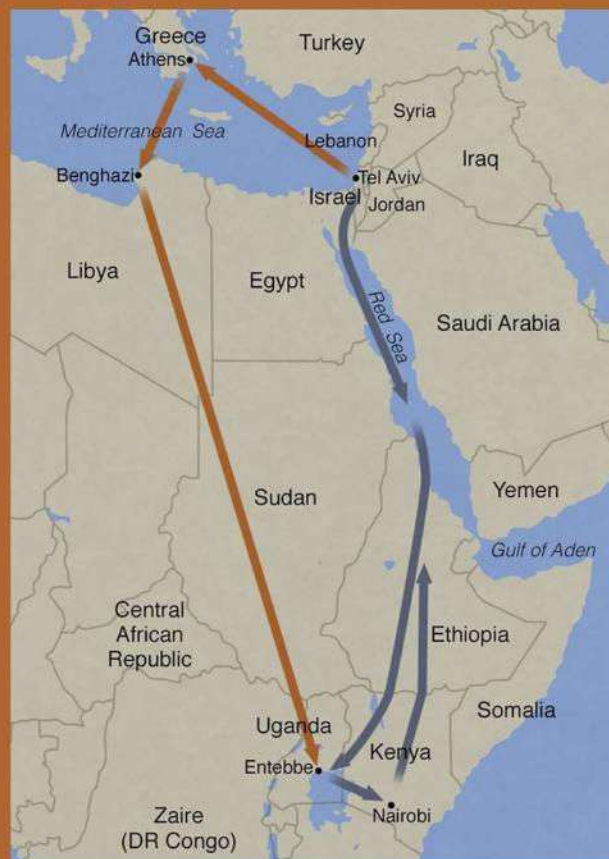
Meanwhile, in Israel, the government had received news of the hijackers' demands: the release of 53 'freedom fighters' imprisoned in five countries – including 40 in Israel – by noon on Thursday. If not, they would begin killing hostages. Rabin responded by requesting that Lieutenant-General Motta Gur, the IDF chief of staff, attend the evening meeting of the emergency committee.

At that meeting, Rabin asked Gur whether the military "had any way to rescue the hostages". Gur said not yet. In that case, replied Rabin, they would have to consider negotiation.

Later, defence minister Shimon Peres discussed a possible rescue with senior IDF officers. Among the suggestions was Israeli Air Force (IAF) chief Benny Peled's proposal to drop 1,000 paratroopers at Entebbe from Hercules C-130s. Gur dismissed the plan as "fantastic", but all were encouraged by Peres to "continue raising ideas".

Chief of staff Motta Gur dubbed it a "charlatan" plan that might result in another **Bay of Pigs**

## OPERATION THUNDERBOLT THE PEOPLE AND THE PLACES



### DESTINATION ENTEBBE

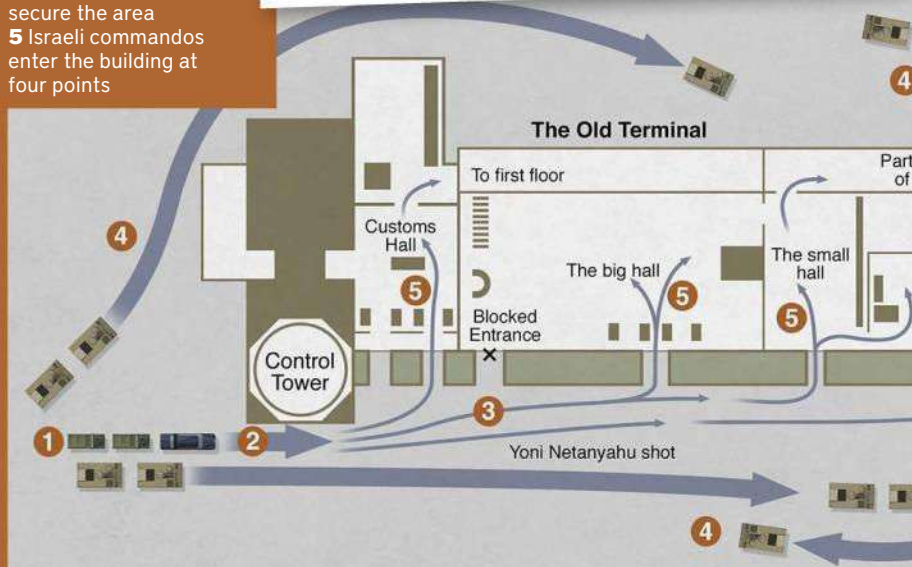
The red lines denote the path of Air France flight 139. Having taken off from Athens en route from Tel Aviv to Paris, the plane was diverted by terrorists to Benghazi in Libya where it refuelled, before flying on to Entebbe Airport in Uganda. The blue lines show the flight path of the four Israeli Hercules planes on their raid to liberate the hostages. They refuelled in Kenya before returning to Tel Aviv

The black Mercedes limousine used to fool Ugandan soldiers guarding the Old Terminal  
↓

PRESS ASSOCIATION

### MAPPING OUT THE RESCUE MISSION

- 1 A fake motorcade, containing a Mercedes limousine and two Land Rovers, advances towards the airport's old terminal
- 2 The convoy stops and commandos run towards the old terminal
- 3 Yoni Netanyahu is shot
- 4 Armoured vehicles secure the area
- 5 Israeli commandos enter the building at four points







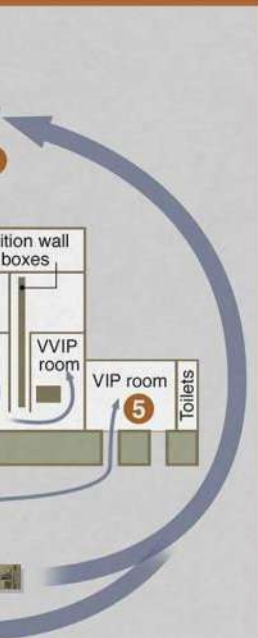
Two of the four terrorists on the airliner were German: Wilfried Böse and Brigitte Kuhlmann



The Ugandan president Idi Amin played a significant and complicit part in the hijacking



In the aftermath of the rescue, Israeli chief of staff Motta Gur briefs the press about the operation



British hostage Dora Bloch remained in a Ugandan hospital having been taken ill during the crisis. Her murder is believed to have been ordered by Idi Amin

## TIMELINE

### 27 June 1976, 12:10pm

Air France flight 139 is hijacked by four terrorists after taking off from Athens, en route from Tel Aviv to Paris.

### 28 June 1976, 3:20am

The plane lands at Entebbe Airport, Uganda. Joined by three comrades, the terrorists move the hostages to the disused Old Terminal building.

### 29 June 1976, 3:30pm

The Israeli government receives the hijackers' demands: the release of 53 imprisoned 'freedom fighters' – including 40 in Israel – by noon on 1 July or the hostages will be killed.

### 30 June 1976, 12pm

The terrorists release a first batch of 47 'vulnerable' hostages. Some give vital information to Israeli intelligence.

### 1 July 1976, 10am

The Israeli cabinet votes unanimously to negotiate to free the hostages.

### 1 July 1976, 12:40pm

Ugandan president Idi Amin informs the hostages that, thanks to his intervention, the terrorists have agreed to release a second batch of 100 hostages and extend the deadline to 2pm on Sunday 4 July.

### 3 July 1976, 1am

IDF chief of staff Motta Gur tells minister of defence Shimon Peres that the rehearsal for a rescue mission "went well and I think the plan will work".

### 3 July 1976, 3:41am

Four heavily laden Hercules planes, carrying 200 Israeli commandos, four armoured cars and a medical team, take off from an airfield in the Sinai and head south towards Uganda.

### 4 July 1976, 12:01am

Hercules One lands at Entebbe Airport, followed by the other three aircraft a few minutes later.

### 4 July 1976, 12:52am

Hercules Four takes off from Entebbe Airport with 101 rescued hostages. Three more are either dead or mortally wounded. The remaining hostage – grandmother Dora Bloch – is in a Kampala hospital and is later murdered on Amin's orders.

## Day 4 Wednesday 30 June

At noon, the terrorists released 47 vulnerable hostages, including 12-year-old Olivier Cojot who, on reaching Paris that evening, gave vital information to "some Israeli people" (men from Mossad, the country's secret service) about the old terminal, the terrorists and the attitude of the Ugandans – as did "a veteran officer of the French army".

## Day 5 Thursday 1 July

At an early-morning meeting of the emergency committee, Gur said that none of his planners' three rescue plans – a seaborne attack across Lake Victoria, a parachute drop, and forces hidden in a civilian plane – was close to operational. "In that case," said Rabin, "I intend to propose to the full cabinet that we negotiate."

Shimon Peres objected on principle, saying it would encourage more terrorism. But Rabin was adamant and the full cabinet, meeting an hour later, agreed, as did the leaders of the opposition. It would not be a tactical ruse to gain time, said Rabin, and Israel would "keep her side of any bargain". Word was at once conveyed to Entebbe, via the French.

At Entebbe, the hostages were counting down the minutes to the deadline when Idi Amin arrived with momentous news. He had persuaded the terrorists to release a second batch of 100 non-Israeli hostages and to extend the deadline to 2pm on Sunday 4 July.

This gave the IDF three days to perfect a rescue plan. Aware, now, that Amin was helping the terrorists, they abandoned the schemes with no exit strategy and concentrated instead on one that involved landing four C-130 transport planes at the airport, "freeing the hostages, and flying out". The first plane would contain The Unit's assault →





**HOME GROUND** Back in Tel Aviv, Israeli troops carry away an injured hostage in need of medical attention. Three hostages died during the rescue

force and three vehicles – including a Mercedes limousine – to transport it to the old terminal. The follow-up planes would bring in reinforcements, armoured cars and medical personnel.

Peres approved the mission, codenamed Operation Thunderbolt. Gur was less impressed, dubbing it a “charlatan” plan that might result in another Bay of Pigs, the disastrous, CIA-resourced invasion of Cuba in 1961. What was needed was more intelligence. But, in the meantime, secret preparations would continue.

The obvious man to lead the assault team was The Unit’s commander Yoni Netanyahu, just back from an exercise in the Sinai. But Netanyahu, the older brother of future Israeli prime minister Benjamin, was close to burnout and unpopular with some of his men. So Ehud Barak was chosen instead, with a furious Netanyahu as his deputy.

#### Day 6 Friday 2 July 1976

Among the second batch of released

hostages who arrived in Paris in the early hours was Frenchman Michel Cojot who gave Mossad more vital intelligence about the terrorists and the terminal layout.

Soon after, Peres received the welcome news that Kenya – with whom Israel maintained close security links – would allow the rescue planes to refuel in Nairobi. He at once informed Gur and they both briefed the prime minister on the plan. Rabin was not convinced. The operation was, he said, the “riskiest... we’ve known” and the IDF’s intel-

Prime minister Rabin was not convinced. The operation was the **“riskiest ... we’ve known”**

ligence incomplete. Preparations could continue but the mission was “subsidiary to ongoing negotiations”.

The Unit’s assault team practised without Barak who, at the last minute, was ordered to fly to Kenya to take charge of the refuelling. Netanyahu assumed command, with experienced soldier Muki Betser drilling the assault teams. The Ugandans are “not going to shoot at us” in a Mercedes, Betser told his men, but “if they do... let the back-up crews handle it. We concentrate on the break-in.”

To check that the lead plane could land in darkness, Gur went on a hair-raising dry run to the Sinai that almost ended in disaster when the pilot mistook a perimeter fence for the runway. Next came a full-scale dress rehearsal of the rescue, one viewed as “very bad” and unrealistic by a senior officer. But Gur seemed satisfied. “The rehearsal went well,” he told Peres, “and I think the plan will work.”

Some of The Unit’s junior officers were less confident and considered



**BRIEFING THE TROOPS** Defence minister Shimon Peres commends Israeli paratroopers after they returned with 101 rescued hostages. "No one believed it was possible," he later said



appealing to ministers to stop the operation "before it ends in disaster". Cooler heads urged delay and in the morning the officers voiced their concerns to Netanyahu who dispelled them one by one.

### **Day 7 Saturday 3 July**

At 11:20am Israel time, Gur told the emergency committee that the rescue plan was viable. Rabin still had reservations, however, notably out-of-date intelligence. Earlier he had told an aide that a successful operation would require fewer than 25 hostage fatalities. Any more and his government would resign.

When the full cabinet met at 1pm, Rabin threw caution to the wind. "We have a military option," he announced. "It has been thoroughly examined and recommended by the chief of staff... We have to take it, even if the price is heavy." While each minister had his say – and many were pessimistic – Gur and Peres left to watch the planes depart from the nearby Lod Air Force

Base. Moments before they took off, photos of Entebbe Airport were given to the mission commander. Taken by a Mossad agent in a light plane, they confirmed the old terminal was lightly guarded.

After a brief refuelling stop in the Sinai, the heavily loaded C-130s struggled to get airborne for the second leg to Entebbe. They flew at barely 100 feet to evade radar detection from hostile states and kept radio silence. Twenty minutes into the flight came word from Tel Aviv: the cabinet had approved the mission. There would be no turning back.

### **Day 8 Sunday 4 July**

Seven hours later, just one minute after midnight, the first plane landed at Entebbe Airport. The runway lights were still on and the pilot had not needed to use his radar. He quickly reduced power – to let paratroopers jump off with electric lanterns for the follow-up planes – and taxied past the new terminal

building to the access strip that led to the old terminal. There he stopped the plane and lowered its ramp, allowing a black Mercedes and two Land Rovers – packed with Netanyahu, Betser and 30 fighters from The Unit – to head down the old runway towards the old terminal.

Turning left onto the terminal's approach road, they were confronted by two Ugandan sentries, one of whom lifted his rifle and shouted "Advance!" Betser knew from service in Uganda that this was standard procedure and the soldier would not fire. But, ignoring Betser's protests, Netanyahu ordered the driver to "cut to the right and we'll finish him off". The silenced bullets only wounded the sentry and, assuming he was about to fire back, an Israeli shot him from one of the Land Rovers, prompting more loud gunshots. With all surprise lost – and Betser fearing the worst – Netanyahu ordered the men out of the vehicles, still 50 yards short of their target.





**RAW EMOTION** A hostage is firmly embraced by relatives on arrival back at Ben Gurion Airport, a week after originally flying out of Israel

With Betser and the break-in teams leading, they raced for the old terminal's main hall, praying they would get there in time. Bullets came out of the darkness and Betser fired back, hitting another Ugandan sentry. Finding the first of the main hall's entrances blocked, Betser ran on. Moments later, Netanyahu was shot from the control tower as he was about to set up his command post.

By now, the sound of gunfire had driven the terrorists back inside the main hall and woken most of the hostages. One saw Wilfried Böse aim his Kalashnikov at those near him and feared he was about to shoot. But the German chose not to, instead urging the hostages to move to safety. He then threw a grenade out of the open window, fell to the floor and fired through the glass door at an approaching figure. His bullets narrowly missed an Israeli commando who fired back, hitting Böse in the head.

Within seconds four Israeli commandos – including Betser – had

entered the hall and cut down three more terrorists, including Kuhlmann. Their bullets also struck and mortally wounded three hostages. In the adjacent rooms, and on the floor above, their comrades killed the other three Palestinian terrorists and any Ugandan soldiers they encountered. By 12:07am, barely six minutes after landing, the old terminal was secure and the remaining hostages safe. Once the troops from the other three planes had secured the airport, the hostages were loaded onto the fourth Hercules and left for Nairobi at

By 12:07am, **barely six minutes after landing**, the Israelis had secured the old terminal

12:52am. The rescue had taken just 51 minutes.

### Aftermath

Of the 105 hostages in Uganda at the time of the raid, one was in a Kampala hospital (and was later murdered on Amin's orders), three were mortally wounded by Israeli bullets and the remaining 101 were rescued. They were met at Ben Gurion Airport by cheering crowds and their emotional relatives.

Rabin later described the rescue as “bold, resourceful and sophisticated”, and one of the IDF's “most exemplary victories from both the human and moral, and the military-operational points of view”. So it was. But it was also a mission marred by political infighting, professional jealousy, hasty planning and tactical blunders, that almost ended in disaster.

That it did not was down to a combination of courage, luck and a last-minute display of humanity on the part of a doomed terrorist. ■



## **THE STORY OF THE HOLY LAND** FROM THE MAKERS OF *BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE*

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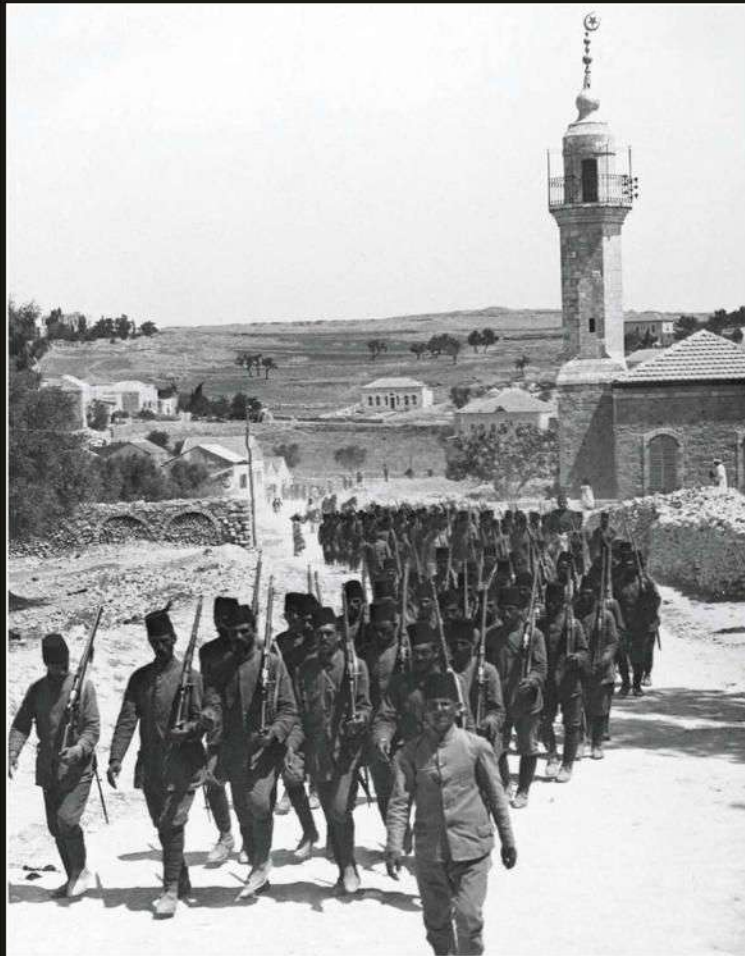
**Jonathan Tubb** is the keeper of the Middle East department at the British Museum. His books include *Canaanites* (British Museum Press, 2006). He reveals what is known of Canaanite culture on page 14.



*Collector's Edition*

# THE STORY OF THE HOLY LAND

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF FAITH,  
WAR AND CONQUEST



“By sunrise on 9 December 1917,  
401 years of Ottoman rule in Jerusalem  
had come to an end”

HISTORIAN EUGENE ROGAN ON THE BRITISH CAPTURE  
OF THE HOLY LAND IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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